

Our pioneer days in Minnesota

MR. AND MRS. NICHOLAS VANDERGON

OUR PIONEER DAYS IN MINNESOTA BY GERTRUDE BRAAT VANDERGON

COPYRIGHT 1949 BY HOLLAND LETTER SERVICE HOLLAND, MICHIGAN U.S.A.

RECEIVED MAR 30 1949 COPYRIGHT OFFICE COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE VI

I. LEAVING HOLLAND 1

II. OCEAN AND TRAIN TRIP 9

III. OUR NEW HOME 21

IV. FALL, WINTER, AND SPRING 41

V. MORE HOLLANDERS ARRIVE 61

VI. UPS AND DOWNS IN FARMING 85

VII. OUR ROMANCE AND NEW HOME 100

VIII. EARLY SETTLER 1166

IX. OUR CHILDREN 120

EPILOGUE 131

PREFACE

For many years as a child, I had heard from time to time bits of Mother's early childhood; of her trip to America; her adventure as a pioneer; and the many hardships she endured; and then the growth and development of the little community in Silver Creek, Minnesota.

It never occurred to me to connect the facts, even though I was always fascinated by the many stories she told me.

Only in late years did I realize that Mother was the only pioneer left in the neighborhood, the only living charter member of the Reformed Church in the community. To those who knew her, she was a person of importance. She knew the back ground and fundamentals of every farm in the territory. Here, she had toiled and labored since early childhood, and now around her she could see three generations taking up the work she started so many years ago and reaping the benefits of all her efforts.

It was in January, 1940, that Mother came to visit us in Sioux City, Iowa, for a few d weeks. She happened to tell a few early day experiences, and the details of her departure from Holland in May, 1867. Again, I was thrilled with the desire to have her tell more and more, and so I urged her to write the story of her life as an inspiration and guide to her son and four daughters, and they in turn could hand it down to their descendants.

vii

Mother told me that in 1867 the early settlers who came to the United States found our country to be a vast storehouse of undeveloped natural resources. She made me feel like a member of the group as she related the story of how these pioneers worked and planned for the benefits of generations yet unborn.

It took more than just raw courage to conquer this wilderness, she said, for these pioneers carried behind their clear eyes a vision that their two hands, coupled with God's help,

Library of Congress

would create a new land of freedom, a place where the troubles of the old world could never again annoy them.

These early settlers were interesting if for no other reason than because it was through their far sighted and unending efforts, combined with sincere faith, that the United States came to be the greatest Nation in the world today.

I inquired who these pioneers were, where they came from. and why they left civilization for this rough, unsettled country. She said that some came for adventure, others to escape military draft, while there were those that dared the dangers of the wilderness in order that their children might have better opportunities.

Today, this generation can see the fruits of their labors, as we travel throughout the United States and see what these early settlers have done for us. We should acknowledge the great debt the people of today owe to their forebears, for it was they who cleared and cultivated our lands built railroads, churches schools, and highways.

ix

I was amazed when Mother told me that when the group of thirty-two Hollanders arrived in Silver Creek, the land was unimproved, except here and there where the Indians had not driven away the settlers. Here they found small clearings in the center of which stood little log houses. The roads could hardly be called wagon roads; they were what the settlers called bridle paths and wound throughout the forests. The only transportation facilities, aside from a few railroads, were wagons drawn by oxen, with hay racks for wagon boxes.

This story is concerned with one of these pioneers, Mrs. Gertrude Braat Vandergon and her descendants who helped develop the state of Minnesota. The early settlers who arrived in Silver Creek in June, 1867, came directly from Holland, and through their untiring efforts, built this section of Minnesota into an ideal farming community. Silver Creek is located forty-five miles Northwest of Minneapolis, twelve miles from Monticello, twenty-five miles east of St. Cloud, and eight miles from Buffalo, now the County seat of

Library of Congress

Wright County. The beautiful lakes make this section of Minnesota very popular, especially during the summer months, bringing tourists from all over the United States to the many resorts. The popular Cedar Lake, Big Lake, Buffalo Lake, and many others are found in this territory.

You, who have known Mother, will appreciate her sense of humor. It will even give you a bit of her radiant personality, and you will find throughout the entire story that patience and understanding helped to make her life easier.

x

Since Mother came from her home in Holland, she lived through many hardships and saw much sorrow, yet she rose above it all and told us again and again that there was more happiness in this world than sadness, more joy than despair, and urged us to face life with honesty, faith, and courage.

The story Mother told us in Sioux City, Iowa was interrupted for a time when she departed for her home in Minnesota; however, she promised that each month she would write a chapter for the book of her life's history. In June, 1949, Mother wrote the first chapter in the form of a letter, and from month to month when the large envelopes found their way to my mail box, I was amazed at her clear memory in recalling her experiences and the developments which came to the community from year to year.

Mother tells her story in her own natural quiet way. It contains incidents handed down from her parents, and drawn from the dates and facts in the diary she kept for her children.

—Cornelia Vandergon Workhoven.

1

Chapter One LEAVING HOLLAND

My dear Children,

Library of Congress

For months, you have requested me to describe our trip across the ocean, our early life in Silver Creek, Minnesota, and the development of the community.

How well I remember when I returned from school in Amsterdam. Holland and found our lovely home all upset, the home which had been built for our family. It had always been a well kept orderly home. The rooms were large with high ceilings; there was a library too, with everything in it to make a cozy, happy place for the family. Our yard was spacious and well kept, a large fig tree and many flowers helped to make it look very attractive. Our home was on Westerstraat. (West Street).

I can still see my Mother sitting near the tree amid the flowers, knitting, sewing or crocheting, while we children played at her feet and watched her take the tiny stitches. It was here that my older sister Mary and I learned to knit. It may seem very strange to the children of this generation, but before we were seven years of age. we could hold our knitting gracefully and knit plain articles without dropping a stitch. In that day, lovely hand work was a real art, There was no factory knit clothing or lace edgings.

2

As I entered the front hall of our home that bright April afternoon, I noticed that the large paintings and photographs of my grandparents were removed from the walls and placed face down in the corner of the hall. When I questioned Mother, she said, "We are moving to America, Gertrude, and have no room for the large frames in our trunks". Of course, I cried and sobbed, for I did not want to leave our home, playmates, and relatives. I showered Mother with many questions and assured her we would not enjoy living in America. Wouldn't they leave me with my grandparents and aunts? How little did we realize that our future life was to be darkened by hardships and adversities.

Mother tried to comfort me, as she informed me that in another week or ten days when our packing was completed, we would visit the relatives in Maasliis and Gouda. She was certain we would enjoy that immensely.

Library of Congress

After this explanation, she urged me to accompany the maid to the store, where she was to purchase both white and black paint. The large trunk like boxes built for the long difficult journey were to be painted inside and out. Our names would be painted in large white letters, on each trunk. The trunks also would be numbered and contents marked.

On our way to the store I asked the maid many questions, for it was my intention to learn just why we were leaving everything that was dear to us.

During the preceding winter, I had heard my parents and a number of their friends talk and argue about this new country, America, and its many possibilities. They studied maps and 3 gazed at beautiful pictures Mr. Kloose, a land agent, brought them. He came to our home often and met with the interested Hollanders, and after a time convinced the entire group that America was the ideal place to live for it offered more opportunities for the young people. "Just why do we go to a place where we cannot take our belongings?", I asked the maid. They are selling and giving away many beautiful treasures. If it was pennies they wanted, I had a bag full of them, for father had given me a penny for every Bible verse I memorized.

In America, the maid said, "There is so much gold, you will receive a gold dollar for every Bible verse you memorize". She had heard Kloose tell there was room and money for every one in America.

Just at that time, someone knocked on the door. The maid answered the call, then gave father the message. It was from father's sister urging my parents to come to Gouda. Grandmother Braat (father's Mother) was seriously ill. Everyone was upset and alarmed for father's Mother was never ill. It was Mother's Mother, Das, who was always ailing, and we expected she would pass away long before grandmother Braat. What a consternation it made in our home. There were no busses or autos like we have in this day and age. Mother and father had been sorting dishes, clothing, silver, and bedding, The house in general was upset. They quickly packed their valises and soon were on their way to

Library of Congress

Gouda. I wanted to accompany them, but they had only a short time before train time; so it was arranged that brother Richard and John, sister Mary and little Gertrude stay with the maid. In a few days, my parents returned with the good news that grandmother Braat was 4 much improved, so my parents resumed their sorting and packing. For several days, they were assisted by experienced movers, for Mother decided she definitely would not give up her Dresden China and good silver. So most of the good china, silver, and our best clothing and linens were packed in one huge trunk. Other trunks were packed, numbered and labeled. However, before the packing was completed we received a message from Gouda saying Grandmother Braat had passed away. This time, we accompanied our parents to Gouda. It was a sad experience for us all, for we loved her dearly. She seemed especially close to me, for the reason, perhaps, I was named for her, Gertrude Appolonia Braat. She visited in our home a great deal and made her home with us for a year after grandfather Braat passed away. She had lived in her own home for only a short time. She was only sixty-three years of age. They called her illness obstruction of the bowels, which is the same as appendicitis. Her name before she married was Prossman. She was born in 1804. Her husband, my grandfather was born in 1802. He was a printer and had been Mayor of Gouda and principal of a school. He preceded her in death six years. Grandmother had told me her people lived in Sluiswyk, her father was a Captain in the army when Holland was at war with Spain.

My mind goes back to many kindnesses grandmother showered on all her grandchildren. Mother told me when I came into the world, the doctor injured my left ear with an instrument. The nurse maid who cared for me had not taken a course in combating germs, so in a short time infection set in. The doctor came faithfully each day to burn my ear, assuring Mother 5 it would eventually kill the infection, but instead it became worse. It was then my grandmother Braat came, dismissed the doctor and took complete charge of me. She had a remedy of her own. Mother did not remember what she added to the ointment, but the foundation was olive oil. In a short time, my ear was healed, although the scar of

Library of Congress

this doctor's ignorance I still carry with me, This incident brought us very close together, and so I wanted to look like her and hoped to have her sweet disposition when I grew up.

After grandmother's funeral, father was detained for some time, since he had to attend to business affairs of the estate before he left for America.

Grandmother's home seemed so different since she was gone. Every room I entered had a strange, quiet stillness to it; so I was very happy when father announced that we were ready to return to Amsterdam.

Our joy was short lived, however, for a few days after we arrived home. we received word that Grandmother Das (Mother's Mother) had passed away in Maasliu. She was seventy-six years of age. She was born in 1791. Her husband, my grandfather Das, had a Cod Liver oil plant and also manufactured paints and candles. Grandmother Das had been ill for some time. She had cancer near her eye, so her death was not unexpected. After the funeral, Mother informed us we would stay with grandfather several days or weeks for he was so very lonely. He was seventy-seven years of age. Then, too, it would give us an opportunity to visit our relatives and friends and bid them good-bye.

6

We were royally entertained by all, and I predicted a very pleasant time for myself for the next few weeks. Wherever we visited, they showered us with love and gifts to take to America. One gift I still prize very highly is a little knitted coin purse made in the shape of a little kettle, from my Aunt. As we visited in grandfather Das's home, my mind went back to the time we came to this home to help celebrate the Das Golden wedding anniversary, (My grandparents). Each family was allowed to bring their youngest child. I happened to be the youngest in our family, so was the lucky one.

I remember so well the large rooms and high ceilings and the long mirrors in each room that shone so brightly. I especially liked the spacious dining room. When I peeked in through the half open door, I was amazed to see the long tables with their attractive

Library of Congress

decorations. My grandfather Das had written the names of the guests on tiny cards. They were all in their places waiting to welcome the guests who claimed the name. In no time, I had gone around the table to look for my name. I tiptoed so no one would hear me. When I heard foot steps, I noticed it was the maid, I did not hesitate to tell her I was looking for my name. How could they overlooked my name?She quickly informed me that this long table was reserved for grown-ups. Grandfather and grandmother had eight children, so this table was set for their children and in-laws, and other special guests and relatives. The maid informed me there was a table set for the children in grandfather's library.

Soon the carriages arrived, bringing Aunts, Uncles, cousins, and friends. I find in the corner of my memory hall the picture of my Mother and Father as they entered the dining room. Father was not tall, but was of average height. His black hair, blue eyes, and fair skin made him look very distinguished and proud, as he ushered my Mother into the dining room. Mother was a dainty, little woman. She had large, brown eyes. Her dark hair with its natural wave attractively combed. It seemed like only yesterday that I used to climb on her lap and place my fingers in those wide waves. Throughout her entire life, her hair remained beautiful, later on with a touch of silver in it, which somehow made the waves look a bit more soft.

The relatives visited and had a good time during the dinner hour, while the children had an equally good time in the library. After the dinner, the children were invited to join the relatives in the dining room. Grandfather Das took me on his knee. He was especially nice to me it seemed, my uncle, seated next to grandfather, took out a large scroll. It was about fifty inches long and almost as wide. It was our Family Tree. It was drawn tree fashion on parchment. The names of our ancestors, dates of births, marriages and deaths were all neatly recorded. At present, a cousin, Mrs. Riup Van Duchteren, has it in her possession. The tree was started in 1600, so was an interesting heirloom.

I followed the different branches, and then with the help of my grandfather I found my own name. He told me I was born in Leyden, a suburb of Leyendorp (Dorp means town).

Library of Congress

Mother's brother lived there and had taken over the candle and paint manufacturing plant, also the cod liver oil plant. Grandfather Das was born in 1790. His father he showed me on the family tree, was born in 1766. He owned many large ships that sailed to and from East Indies to bring supplies.

8

My father, Arend Herman Braat, had moved to Amsterdam and had studied medicine, but changed his course and became an architect. He drew the plans and made blue prints for the public building in Amsterdam.

The days passed very swiftly. We saw all our relatives and friends, and plans were soon made to return to Amsterdam. An outstanding visit was in the home of my great Aunt, she had celebrated her ninetieth birthday. She served cake and tea at four o'clock in dainty, little china cups, children under twelve had milk and cake. It was the dainty, little cups that fascinated me. Another outstanding visit was in the home of a well to do uncle, Mother's brother Marinus (Martin). He was ten years younger than Mother. My Mother was born March 30, 1826. Uncle Marinus was born in 1836. He had no children. He was very fond of Mother, his sister Johanna. He pleaded with father not to take his sister and family away to an unknown country. He knew it was not as salesman Kloos had made him believe. He offered father fifteen thousand Guilders (a guilder is valued at forty cents) if he would only stay and raise his family in Holland. Otherwise, he would leave our family out of his will when he passed away. He wanted to force father into staying. Father said he was not going to be bribed. He told Uncle emphatically he planned to leave Holland in May, 1867. Prior to this time, and after our visit in his home, he wrote several letters to father urging him not to go to America, but father was convinced it was the right thing to do for his children and grandchildren.

And so we ended our visit in Maasluis, the goodbyes were said, the remaining article packed for our long trip to America, an unknown land of which we heard so much and still knew so very little, as we learned afterwards.

Chapter II OCEAN AND TRAIN TRIP

My dear Children,

Many relatives and friends came to the dock to bid us farewell. Of course, we all knew we would never see our loved ones again. The parting was difficult as well as sad. In a corner of my memory hall, I find a sad picture of that special day. Grandfather Das, Mother's father, an elderly man of seventy-seven years, Mother's three brothers and four sisters were at the dock before we arrived. Tears could not be withheld. Grief stricken grandfather could not bear to see his daughter Johanna and family leave all that was so dear to them, besides the comforts they had enjoyed, and go to an unknown country. After the last farewells were said, he walked away several yards and then suddenly turned around, ran toward us, kissed us again and again, embraced his daughter (my Mother) as he said "Oh Johanna, my Johanna." The time for parting had come; it meant for all of us broken hearts, homes and what later turned out to be broken hopes.

Mother was overcome with grief. Leaning heavily on father's arms, they walked into the boat. We children followed our parents, glancing back from time to time for a last look of our dear ones and Holland. We were so devoted to each other as a family.

We stayed on deck for a short while, being too bewildered to know what to do. The truth of the matter was, we didn't care. Officers soon told us sternly to do downstairs at once. 10 Everyone had to get settled. The stairs were made of strong ropes, interwoven. Our room was assigned to us; we had to get settled, for we knew it would be several weeks before we would reach New York. The room had four beds of the double deck type. Father and brother Richard, aged seventeen, and John, aged eleven, occupied the upper berths, while Mother, sister Mary, aged thirteen, and myself occupied the lower berths. We traveled as second class passengers so were quite comfortable. We felt very much favored when we looked through an open door and saw the people of the third class sleeping

Library of Congress

on the floor, their arms for pillows, old coats for extra covering. These people stayed by themselves, never tried to mingle with the other passengers. One day we saw them eat bread with raw pork from their baskets. We rushed to tell father, for he had always warned us never to eat raw pork. We begged him to tell these unfortunate people; somehow father did not seem the least disturbed.

The interesting thing about our room was the two round windows. It was especially interesting to us, for we knew we could see parts of large fishes as they passed our windows.

We had many friends on this boat. Our group consisted of thirty-two anxious, bewildered souls. They were all from Amsterdam and were also influenced by the real estate salesman, Mr. Kloos, to come to America. Their forebears, too, had always done more to cultivate the mind than develop the muscles. I would like to give you the names of the members of our group, so that later on when I mention them, you will be able to place them without any difficulty: Mr. and Mrs. A. De Leewen and four children. Mr. and Mrs. C. De Leewen and one child. 11 Mr. and Mrs. Peter Myst and seven children. Mr. and Mrs. Gerriet Daubanton and two children. Dr. Kamhout, Chas. and Ed. Van Hakeron, these men were barons and very wealthy. Their names really were Van Branzenburg, Van Hakeron, Gerriet Van Dyk. My father, mother and four children. Perhaps you would like to know how old the children were, especially those of you who remembered our old friends and neighbors, you have heard us speak of so many times. I cannot give you the correct ages of the grown-ups in our group. Peter Myst's children Peter, twenty-six; Margaret, twenty-four; William, twenty-two; Nelly, twenty, Gertrude, sixteen; Frank, Eleven; and Mary, eight years. The Danbanton children, Bertha, four and a half years: John, two and one-half years. The De Leewen children, Cornelius, twenty-four years; his wife Mary, his age; and baby, three months old; and John, fifteen. The C. De Leewen's had a son nine years of age. This child was an invalid. He had received a back injury when he was a small child. Dr. Kamhout was twenty-four years of age. Chas. Van Hakeron was twenty-five; Ed Van Hakeron, twenty-seven. As I said before, their names were Van Branzenburg, Van

Library of Congress

Hakeron. Soon after coming to America, they omitted the Van Branzenburg. It was too difficult for the pioneers to pronounce. These men had rich possessions in East Indies. They came here merely to see America. If they didn't like it, they didn't intend to stay. Gerriet Van Dyk, was twenty-one. His father owned a grocery store.

You can well imagine the children had no time to be lonesome on the boat. We wandered around the deck. We watched passengers; some looked sick while others looked happy; then there were others who looked very sad, like my mother and father.

12

Time did not weigh heavy on our hands, there was always something on deck to amuse us, and the ocean seemed an endless mass of water.

Our entire group ate our meals together. My parents have told me time and again that the food was well prepared and plenty of it. It was difficult to keep the tea in the cups and soup in the bowls whenever the sea was boisterous. It was amusing to us children to watch this liquid move closer and closer to the edge and then find its way out over cup or soup bowl. Whenever the weather was calm, those of us who were not sea sick made great plans for our new home and life in Minnesota.

Three days after we left Amsterdam, we arrived in Liverpool and were required to have a physical examination. All thirty-two were pronounced in good condition, so we were allowed to continue our journey.

When we left Liverpool, the grown-ups spent most of their time making plans also drawing sketches for their new homes. This fascinated the children as well as the older folks. One day as I sat on father's knee, he unrolled a large scroll. The men studied it carefully as father drew the plans. They would divide the land, each family have his own home and in the center of the section build a church, and in time, also build a parsonage. Some men in our group figured the eighty acres would be sufficient land to keep the entire group busy and support them also. According to Mr. Kloos, this was correct. He also assured the

Library of Congress

Hollanders that every inch of ground could be used to good advantage. Minnesota always received an abundance of rain; the soil was just right to raise anything they desired. No one knew anything about farming, but it did not seem difficult as Mr. Kloos explained the work. He assured the men that the neighbors would be glad to give them advice. It seemed like an adventure, and they were eager to get started.

On Sunday, we had church service. The Captain read a sermon, we sang hymns, and someone offered prayer. When the weather permitted, we held our services on deck. However when weather was rough, the meetings were held downstairs.

One day, Mary Myst and myself wandered around the ship. (We loved to peek in doors) This particular day, we saw quite a commotion, chairs and a little table in one corner, and on a large table was the body of a woman. Mary said, "This woman must be ill, Gertrude. We must tell our parents; maybe they can help". Just then the woman's husband and two little daughters came. They were overcome with grief, so Mary and I wept also. We wished we had not peeked in the door.

Many passengers came to attend the funeral services. We were very curious so after coaxing our parents, they gave their consent to our attending this strange funeral. It was so different; a short sermon, a hymn and prayer. The lady was placed in a black sack and lowered into the ocean. It made a lasting impression on us. I can still see the husband and his two little daughters weep. It gave us a very lonely feeling as we continued our trip to America. We hoped our group would keep well, for it seemed so cruel to place a human being in a sack, lower them and sail away. We were afraid our Mother would become ill, and we would have to go through this horrible experience. Mother was frail, so the trip was hard on her. Twenty-five days after 14 we left Liverpool, we finally arrived in New York on June 4, 1867. It was a beautiful, calm day. The sky was so clear and bright. How wonderful it was to see land once more; To look at the ocean for twenty-eight days is very monotonous.

Naturally, we were all concerned about our trunks and luggage. Father said he felt safe since he had his name on every trunk. His trunks were numbered too, so no-one would mistake his trunks for theirs. He had also insured our trunks; he said it would only take a short time to locate our possessions. Of course every trunk and box had to be inspected by a hard boiled inspector, feather beds were slashed open to see if any valuables were hidden inside. The inspectors were not so disagreeable when they went through our things. Each one of us had a case, valise suit case, or box to care for and cling to. A tin box with a handle was assigned to me. It contained medicine and bandages; in fact, it was our first aid kit. Father had packed it for our trip. I still have the tin box with lock and key. I remember we looked at our hands from time to time. The deep red lines caused by the weight and the firm grip caused our hands to become red. Some of the baggage had rope handles which was hard on the hands, but we did not complain. We were too bewildered and marched bravely back of our parents. Dick, who had a wonderful sense of humor, asked Mother if the Israelites, on their way from Canna, loaded their children down with possessions like ours.

It was a sad sight to see the foreigners sit on their luggage. It seemed the inspectors were especially cranky with the third class people. We were all so bewildered.

15

It didn't seem so long and we were merrily on our way again. The train was a delightful change from the boat and more interesting too, for we enjoyed seeing towns, land and scenery as we traveled day after day. It was so different from the country we had left behind. We saw so much waste land. Holland was more crowded. Every bit of the land is used to advantage. None of our relatives lived on farms, but we saw the country many times as we went by train to Gouda, Maasluis, or Rotterdam.

It took us one week to travel from New York to St. Paul, Minnesota. We slept in the car seats. They could not be lowered, so we sat bolt up right. Father brought baskets of food for our family, it was always a big disappointment; it gave us a satisfied feeling for the

Library of Congress

time being. We had to change cars and stay over night in Prairie Du Chien, Wisconsin. In due time, we landed in St. Paul, Minnesota. We clung to our luggage like real soldiers and faithfully followed our parents out of the train and into the station. We hired a hack to take us to the Harpeth Hotel, where we would meet Mr. Kloos. The hotel manager must have wondered how so many Hollanders happened to be going to the same place the same time. Our parents could speak English, although with a Dutch accent. All the other members in our group could speak English, although a little faulty. We children were very proud for we knew several words. Mr. Kloos had made reservations for us at the hotel and assured us he would be there to meet us. Such a tired dirty, weary group we were when we finally landed in the hotel!

How many wonderful stories he told us in Holland of the country, the high salaries, good Schools and positions. So we were all 16 eager to see more of this country and did not want to be delayed in St. Paul, Minnesota.

My father had paid Kloos five dollars an acre for uncleared land and twenty dollars an acre for the land that was supposed to be cleared. It was also supposed to have a house and stables. We expected to move right in when we arrived.

We inquired at the hotel where this land agent was. He had faithfully promised us he would be at the station to meet us. We learned there was no-one by the name of Kloos registered at the hotel. Mr. Kloos had left no message for us, so the only thing we could do was to settle ourselves in the hotel and try to be comfortable while we waited for Mr. Kloos. After being cooped up in the hotel for several days, the children became restless. We begged to go outside to play. There were nine of us; so with an Indian hoop father bought in a near by store, we left our rooms. We found an enclosed yard in the rear of the hotel. It seemed it was purposely built for children. Our happiness was short lived, however, for a young chap about fifteen years of age came along and wanted to get inside the fence. We pushed him aside and told him to get out. We could understand what he said. We knew a few English words. He talked so fast we knew he was angry. As soon as he reached

Library of Congress

the outside of the fence, he picked up a stone and threw it at us. It happened to strike my forehead. He looked back to see if we were following him and then fled. My brother Dick and Frank Myst carried me to our room in the hotel, the blood streaming over my face. I cried "My head! My head!" Our Dr. Kamhout quickly bathed the wound. At first he thought there was a crack in the skull, but after examining it closely, he decided it was a bad cut. 17 A scar on my ear and the scar I feared I would have on my forehead worried me greatly.

With my head bandaged up, I stayed in bed for several days. Then one day, Mother gave me a mirror so I could look at my forehead. I was horrified to see that part of my black curls were gone and any ugly bare place on my head. Mother explained to me that it was easier to dress the wound and in time the hair would grow out again. When I was able to go outside, father brought me a large straw hat like so many children were wearing for street wear. I liked the new hat and besides, it covered the bald spot.

You can still see the scar on my forehead. How many many times, I have had to tell the story of the naughty little street urchin who caused me to go through life with this scar. My children, grand children, and great grandchildren, as well as nieces and nephews have wanted to hear the story Over and over again. It seemed like a fairy story to them. When they sat on my lap, they would say, "Tell me how the naughty boy hit you on your head", as they pointed to the scar.

After staying in the Harpth hotel for three weeks, our friend, Mr. Kloos, the land agent, put in his appearance. He claimed he was married and visited his relatives in Wisconsin.

So we, like the Israelites, journeyed on. We assembled our belongings and each child took his assigned piece of baggage. We boarded the train in St. Paul and departed for Big Lake, Minnesota, some thirty-five miles from St. Paul. Here we were met at the little station by men who had two hay racks drawn by oxen and also a 18 wagon. They loaded our many trunks and possessions. Our family had threw large boxes filled with bedding, also

Library of Congress

an organ. As the men were loading the trunks on the hay rack, father counted them, and in a moment he noticed one trunk was missing. It was the one marked "Silver, best clothing, and dishes". Many pieces of precious jewelery given to us for keepsakes were also in this trunk. "The trunk is gone", stormed father. He was frantic as he paced back and forth on the station platform. Father had counted the trunks in St. Paul before we left. We had sixteen trunks in all. They were insured, the station agent said; but no money could pay for the precious keepsakes and all the trunk contained. The depot agent assured father over and over again that he would have this trunk traced. It proved to be a theft in St. Paul. The trunk was never located, and no insurance paid for our belongings.

We watched these strange men load our trunk with wide open eyes. The oxen looked so different from any animal we had ever seen. It had turned cold that day, even if it was the last of June. The wind came briskly from the Northwest. Our teeth wouldn't stay quiet. No matter how we tried, our teeth continued to chatter and chatter. We waited for these men while we anxiously watched our disturbed parents bustle about trying to figure out where the last trunk could be, and clung tightly to our assigned baggage for fear someone might snatch it from us. We didn't know if Americans could be trusted. Mr. Kloos failed us, the boy threw the rock at me, and now our trunk filled with our most precious articles was gone. The hay racks were finally loaded. They left a space on each hay rack for the children and some grown ups could ride in the wagon, also drawn by oxen. Poor frail Mother quietly wept as we rode along; thinking of her precious 19 possessions. Mother was so thankful they had not placed the extra money in the trunk. Father placed most of his money in a belt. It was a wide belt with pockets all around it on the inside. He wore it day and night.

We cuddled close together as we rode over the rough roads, or, as I said before, they could hardly be called wagon roads for there were too many stumps of trees and stones. You can well imagine, we did not travel at break neck spread, with the slow oxen pulling the heavy load.

Library of Congress

In time, we arrived at the farm father brought from Mr. Kloos. Again, we sat breathless. "Yes, this is the farm," the driver said, waiting for us to Jump out and unload.

"It cannot be the farm", father said, "for Mr. Kloos told us our farm would have a house and two barns." Poor Mother looked stunned. All we saw on the place was a large log house without a roof and two small log stables. The Indians had driven the owners away, they said, and the fire burned the roof from the log house.

Mr. Kloos did not tell us the country was wild and unimproved, that the homes were rough log houses, and poorly built at that, and that the Indians Chased people away or burned their homes if they would not leave. He told them all the glorious stories about Minnesota and sold us the eighty acres of land. Mr. Myst, too, had bought eighty acres of land Joining our farm. The other men decided to buy land after they arrived in Silver Creek. They told Kloos they wanted farms joining father's and Mr. Myst's. We never saw Mr. Kloos again after he put us on the train bound for Big Lake.

20

Sitting in an open wagon, hungry and tired, with a cold breeze blowing from the North, did not get us any where. Of course, we could not move into a roofless log cabin. We had no food or stove with us.

It was then a good neighbor, Mr. Price, came to our rescue. He invited us all to come to his home. It was located three-fourths of a mile from what is now Silver Creek, Minnesota, twelve miles from Monticello, and seventeen miles from Big Lake. We were so grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Price who made us feel so welcome in their warm log cabin and gave us nourishing food.

21

Chapter III OUR NEW HOME

My dear Children,

Library of Congress

As we drove on the yard where the Price family lived, we saw a low roofed log cabin half hidden among the trees and morning glory vines. We quickly noticed an abundance of flowers, near and around the house, also a long row of wild plum, trees in bloom.

The house was large for a log house, most of the bark had been neatly removed from the logs, a jog was cut in each log so they would fit more smoothly and evenly. We discovered that lime had been plastered between the logs so no wind, snow, bugs, or mosquitoes could enter.

No other log house in that part of Minnesota was so well built or well equipped. There was a real door which was made of boards, some four inches thick, with large wooden hinges nailed on with huge nails. There were four windows, each having a sash of four panes. The sash opened on real iron hinges. Outside of the windows there were heavy board shutters which opened outward but could be securely fastened from within with huge iron hooks as a protection from the Indians. It also helped to keep out the cold winter wind. Outside the windows, we saw mosquito netting neatly nailed on the window casing to keep out flies and mosquitoes, that were generally plentiful in the summer. Mrs. Price told us that each year she tacked new netting on the window frames. When she set the table, she placed a tall water pitcher on each corner of the table, and also in the center of the table. Then she spread a large cloth over the entire table, usually 22 a sheet kept for that purpose. Food was placed under the sheet until we were ready to eat our meal.

The chimney was not built of stones and clay like most chimneys, instead mortar was used. Most all the log cabins in the neighborhood had dirt floors, but the Price cabin boasted of having real pine floors, and every care was taken to keep it spotlessly clean. The floors were partly covered with strips of home made rag rugs. The roof had shingles too. The majority of log cabins had a roof made of some wide logs covered with hay and sod. Many, too, were built into the hillsides and had dirt roof, floor, and sides; only the front was built up with logs, a door and perhaps two windows.

Library of Congress

We entered the house and soon noticed the room was large, some 16 × 20 feet. This was the kitchen and dining room. Another room had recently been built; it was spacious and was their living room. Although the cabin looked low, it had what they called a loft, consisting of two rooms.

The Price family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Price and their nine months old baby. They reserved one bedroom for their family. They offered the other bedroom to my parents. The other members of our group slept on floors.

It was several days before the remainder of our trunks arrived from Big Lake. Life was more comfortable after the treasured feather beds arrived and were spread on the living room and kitchen floors. They were easily rolled up during the day time and piled in the corner of the room. The women and small children had the kitchen floor, the men the living room floor. A few of the young men slept in the homes of neighbors. It was a comical sight when 23 passing from one room to another to see these people packed like sardines on the floor. I remember Mr. and Mrs. De Leewen found it especially difficult to sleep on the floor and complained a great deal. It was no small task for Mr. and Mrs. Price to have so many guests.

Our organ came with the feather beds after a hard, prolonged voyage. Had it not been for this organ and the joy it brought us as we sang and played our old Dutch songs and hymns, we would have lost our minds. We were all so very homesick and lonely.

There were very few neighbors, but I remember the distinguished looking elderly couple, Mr. and Mrs. Grant, who came from Clearwater, Minnesota many times to visit their daughter, Mrs. Price. The Grants were cousins of U.S. Grant, our president. This was confirmed by papers they showed Father. Mrs. Grant was usually called when the Angel of Life or the Angel of Death hovered over a home. They were educated and very refined and had seen better days. They had owned the Price farm but presented it to their daughter when she married Mr. Price. On this farm was a log barn, built in the same substantial

Library of Congress

manner as their log cabin. All the children in our group enjoyed inspecting the farm. We enjoyed climbing into the trees as well as on top of the log barn. There were also many large Maple and Willow trees on this farm yard.

The Price family, as you can well imagine, did not have enough chairs for all their guests, so benches were made, and for a time the children formed a circle when they sat on the floor, during meal time. We made a queer picture sitting on the floor of a log cabin eating our food from Mother's Dresden china plates. It took a great deal of time to 24 prepare the food for this large family. Mrs. Price used a large milk pail whenever she mixed pancake batter. Our ladies had never seen pancakes before, but soon learned to make them a lovely golden brown. They were much larger than the ones we bake today. Mrs. Price cut up bits of pork and mixed it into the batter to give them an extra good flavor. It also was more nourishing, she told us.

Mr. Price and the neighbors were good hunters, so we were well supplied with meat from the woods, They also went fishing several times each week. Fish were plentiful.

Whenever the men went to Monticello for supplies, they bought rice in large sacks. It was washed in a milk pail, cooked in milk in a special wash boiler kept for that purpose. Each person was given a large plate filled with cooked rice. A small dent was made in the center and a pat of butter placed in the dent, also sugar and cream if we wanted it. They bought butter in ten gallon pails for our large family. Mrs. Price also baked bread, and soon with her help our women were able to bake bread. In those days the flour was stone ground and about eighty percent of the wheat berry was left in the flour. We liked this bread very much for it had a delicious flavor.

All the women in our group had always had maids in Holland, although they planned the meals, they seldom did the cooking, Father, as well as the other men in our group, had made many wonderful plans about building a home for each family, also a church, Each family planned to buy a farm, However, the Indian scare prevented their plans. Soon

Library of Congress

after we arrived in Silver Creek, we heard the Indians carried away women and children and would scalp the men, and then destroy their homes. We also heard that the Federal Government paid the 25 Indians twelve cents an acre for most of the land, and there were many people who believed the Indians got the best end of the deal.

So that was what happened to our log house on the eighty acres we purchased! Now we knew why the settlers moved away and new settlers did not dare to move in. We had heard of Indians before coming to America and had seen many pictures of them with their bright shawls and feathers, and their bows and arrows. It never occurred to us they would harm anyone. We, however, found them friendly, and they never molested us. They came to the house many times and sold trinkets, blankets and beads. Even though they never harmed any of us, we were dreadfully frightened whenever we saw them for fear they might scalp us.

I remember distinctly one night, there was a very strange noise. We eagerly listened as Mr. Price and one of the men ventured outside. They soon discovered it was an owl hooting "Te Whoo, Te Whoo". We were so frightened. Mother shook her head as she assured Father she would never get used to this wild country.

It was then that the Price family told us about the wolves, bears, deer flies, large wood ticks, and the long severe winters, heavy snow falls and blizzards we would have to endure. This worried us a great deal and many in our group thought seriously of returning to Holland. "Not I", said father emphatically, "We can't be cowards". "The states in the East were a wilderness at one time when pioneers came and built it what it is today. Now we must help build up this part of Minnesota, The soil is the best we can find. we have an abundance of rain, the scenery is beautiful. If we can keep well, with God's help we are going to make this an ideal place to live, not only for ourselves²⁶ but for our children, grandchildren and generations yet unborn." Father felt he had a mission to perform, and he would do it to the best of his ability. Each year, there would be new improvements, he

Library of Congress

knew. Our family did not talk of returning to Holland, for we knew Father's mind was made up for all of us.

A week later one night as sister Mary and I, who had been sleeping downstairs on the floor, heard a wagon drive up to the door of the cabin. Someone said, "Gee Haw". We decided to be very quiet, and after pulling our night gowns over our heads, heard very little. The mosquitoes usually hummed us to sleep. After a short time, we thought we heard someone leave the cabin. There was a noise and light upstairs, "Could it be the Indians found Mother and Father and are looking for us?" It I asked Mary. We did not dare to move or speak out loud, the old owl was calling, "Te Whoo, Te Whoo". In this frame of mind, we finally went to sleep. The following morning, sister Mary dressed quickly and hurried upstairs to ascertain if Mother and Father had been taken by the Indians and to learn what all the commotion was about during the night. In a few seconds, she was downstairs and informed me we had a new baby brother and commanded me not to disturb Mother or the new baby. Before she had finished her instructions, I was half way up the stairs, shoes in hand, and at my Mother's side, admiring my new baby brother. In a few days, we felt more free to visit Mother from time to time during the day, and peek at the new baby. We learned afterwards, that the noise Mary and I heard during the night was the coming and leaving of our good friend, Mr. and Mrs. Grant.

Our baby brother cried a great deal. I can still see Father walking the floor both 27 day and night trying to console him. I often begged Father to let me hold him. Being the baby so many years, I felt it was quite a curiosity to have a tiny baby in our family. Father told me I would have to care for him and amuse him during the coming months and years before he would be able to walk and play by himself. The following day when Mary and I made our usual visit to Mother in the cabin loft, we found our parents in tears. A white sheet was drawn over our new baby. Even though he lived only a week, we loved him dearly and were heart broken when Father told us he had passed away during the night, One of the men made a dainty little coffin, the ladies made a little white dress. We had a simple funeral service. He was buried on the farm where we were Boon to start building our new

Library of Congress

home. Later on, Father built a little fence around the grave. Mrs. Price gave us flower seed to plant on our little brother's grave. This was the second funeral we had attended since we left Holland. After the funeral service, we hurried upstairs to Mother who was still in bed and under Mrs. Grant's care. How broken hearted my Mother must have been. Her baby was born three weeks after we arrived in Silver Creek. Mother was so far away from all her relatives, especially her father and sisters.

As time went on, Father and the men decided it might be wise to build one large house on account of the Indian scare. They spent their spare time drawing plans. They did not always agree. However, they all agreed to have one large kitchen, a large living room and dining hall. There would be sufficient bedrooms upstairs to care for all. The men wanted to name the place Noah's Ark. The ladies called it Fort Lilla. Mother told me the house was sixty by eighty and was divided into five apartments.

28

It was a beautiful location. The house was built on a small hill, below which a creek thirty or forty feet rippled. A lake two miles long was only a short distance away. Before we started to build, they borrowed a boat from the neighbors and launched it in the creek, so the men could go down stream to explore. They went down stream about a mile and were enchanted with the beauty of the scenery. but were shocked when they came some thirty feet from the creek's shore to find a well planted orchard of apple and plum trees. They tied their boats and hurried to see this orchard, and noticed a large hole in the ground. The cabin had been burned down. There were little graves on the yard, also two large graves. No-one told us of the tragedy on this little farm.

When Father chose the spot where he wanted to build Fort Lilla, we knew the large Maple and Willow trees would give us plenty shade and also provide a beautiful back ground for our new home. Your children know the spot where our first home was built. Father was determined his house would not be built of logs; so he hired neighbors to haul the lumber from Big Lake, Minnesota. In a short time, with help of the neighbors, our men had the

Library of Congress

skeleton of Fort Lilla well under way, Every day, we brought the noon meal to the men who were working on the house. They wanted to complete it as soon as possible, for they knew it was a hardship for Mr. and Mrs. Price to house our large group. The women cooked the meals and carefully packed the food in dish pans and pails. The dishes, too, were carefully packed. We didn't have the thick heavy cups most farmers had, but we used the dainty china cups and plates we brought from Holland. The small children loved to accompany the older ones and assist in carrying the lunch. Each little hand brought something to fill the hungry builders. Jenny Myst and Johnny Daubenton were not allowed to help carry the lunch for they were only four years of age. I could help, for I was older and felt quite grown up since I carried a pail of sandwiches.

Our new home was a mile and a half from the Price home. It was a very warm summer, so it was not only a different task for the women to cook and pack the food, but it was a very tiresome trip for the children to carry the food the long distance. I remember so well the time Gertrude Myst, who was sixteen. and sister Mary, who was fourteen, carried a large dish pan of cooked potatoes and cooked beans. The handle slipped out of Gertrude's hand, so the potatoes went rolling down the little hill. They cried and laughed all the same time for it was a comical yet pathetic sight. They talked the matter over carefully, for they knew very well if they went back home and the women peeled other potatoes and cooked them, it would be mid afternoon before the men would have their noon meal. Gertrude Myst suggested they gather up the potatoes, carefully brush off the sand and dust, and continue their journey. She said perhaps the men would think it was pepper. We worked quickly, took a knife and went over each potato thoroughly. The potatoes which were badly soiled, we left for the birds. Then we washed the knives in the brook and soon we were on our way. The men were good sports. When they finished their meal we giggled and laughed as we told them of the predicament we had been in. Then we dashed off to tell our mothers so they could have a good laugh too. As I mentioned before, we used our lovely Dresden china cups we brought from Amsterdam. One by one they were broken. Then we had to replace them with ugly thick white cups. We disliked 30 using these

Library of Congress

awkward cups; it was, however, all we could get, yet we all agreed the large thick cups were better suited for the purpose. There was one place in the lake where we used to throw our broken china. It certainly had a great many broken dishes under its beautiful smooth surface. It did not diminish beauty of the scenery or of the lake; its grassy hills and beautiful trees along the shores.

The Price home was located only a few rods from this lovely lake, on which we usually saw a few boats, or canoes bobbing up and down. We children were fascinated as we sat on the shore of the lake and watched the men fish. We said it was our ocean and some day when the boats came ashore, we would sail away to Amsterdam to see our relatives and our home. How surprised and overjoyed our grandfather and relatives would be to see us. Our happiness was complete for the time being as we children lived in a make believe world.

It was the duty of the older boys to cut and carry wood from our new house and convey it to the Price home. The wood the Price family hand cut for their summer's supply was soon consumed. We had paid them for the amount we used for the extra cooking. The boys, Frank Myst, eleven years, and brother John, eleven years, had to drag long poles or trees, and saw or cut them up to proper stove lengths. It seemed as if every one had some task to perform each day. It was a pity to burn the Maple and Oak trees for fire wood, but everyone had more than they needed.

You may have wondered how we managed the laundry work. I want to tell you of our system. Of course, we had no running water in the house, but instead, a deep well, It was the Old Oak Bucket type. The bucket was lowered into the 31 the water, using a windless and then was pulled up, The water was very clear, and cool for drinking. It was quite a job to haul up enough water for the laundry, bathing and cooking. However, in the summer, we had rain barrels, one at each corner of the house. Father made wooden gutters which caught the water as it was leaving the roof, and it ran into the barrels. This was a big help, but it did not supply enough water for our large group. We used it for boiling the clothes,

Library of Congress

washing dainty white dresses, collars, hair ribbons, and our hair. In the summer, we set the tub with the wash board under a tree, On Monday, Mrs. Price washed for her family and a few extra pieces we needed, while the other ladies did the house work and cooking. Each family took its day at the wash tub. There were no washing machines. It was rub-a-dee-dub on the wash board. There was wash day commotion every day of the week but Sunday. We had a roaring fire in the kitchen each day for the white clothes had to be boiled in order to have them snowy white. Besides there was the cooking and baking of bread for our large family.

After the noon dishes were washed and put away, we children used to wander through the forests where we found berries and many wild flowers. We admired the beautiful birds in their different colors. The scenery too was so different from what we had ever seen before. In Amsterdam, we had visited the beautiful parks. The quiet creek had flowers of every description growing around the edge. Then too, we loved to watch the squirrels run up the trees and find things to eat, in fact, we were fascinated by all these new things.

During the warm summer days, all the children in the neighborhood went wading, Our 32 mothers gave us permission to wade in the cool brook also. One day when we were strolling through the woods, I saw a very unusual bug. It could fly too. I tried to catch it and was successful. For an instant I was very happy for I was anxious to show it to Mother. My joy was shortlived, for the animal stung me. Of course, I cried bitter tears. When sister Mary came to my rescue, she informed me it was a bumble bee.

As time went on, our Fort Lilla was the main attraction in the neighborhood. My Mother's strength was so far restored that she was able to ride over to our new place. She was anxious to see where her little one was laid to rest. Father had made a neat little fence around the grave. The plants were growing nicely, and we had kept the weeds out, so Mother was well satisfied. It took the men about four months to complete Fort Lilla, and we were ready to move in. The house had good wood floors. Each family had its own living quarters and there was a joint kitchen and living room. So the women cooked the meals,

Library of Congress

and we had our meals together at a long table. We were all quite satisfied; we felt more safe in case the Indians should come. There was strength in number.

We tried to fix up our living room to make it look homelike. We were so happy we had our organ. Father played his flute whenever he had time. The house was a great improvement over the log house, even though the Price cabin was much better than the average home in that section of Minnesota. Fort Lilla was well built, although it had no plaster on the walls, but what they called clap boards. We had good oak wood in our home. There were no shutters when we moved in. We had not had the time to go to Monticello to purchase mosquito netting, so the mosquitoes moved right in with us. In the evening, it seemed as if they had an orchestra, and well directed at that. When their throats seemed dry and they could sing no more, they would settle on our arms and limbs and draw blood. The following day we would have welts where the mosquitoes bit us.

Father studied architecture in Holland and had followed that profession for years in drawing plans for public buildings in Amsterdam. He evidently had not drawn plans for homes, for in our new home he had made better provision for our books than for clothes. There was a book shelf around the entire living room wall, and rather high for the children to reach or sort out books they needed. We always had to get on a chair. In the bedrooms too was an opening in the wall with shelves for our books. We soon had cupboards and bureaus, for every room. When our dresses were ironed, they had to be neatly folded and carefully tucked into the bureau drawers.

It was a difficult summer for all the members of our group trying to complete the large house, with the assistance of several neighbors who thought they could do carpenter work. They did very well considering that they were trying to put in a crop too. The men came here to become farmers, so had taken some seeds along from Holland, even though not a member in our group had worked or lived on a farm. Father hired men to put in the small grain and to do the plowing. He observed carefully just how it was done and later decided they could plant the corn. They had seen the neighbors sow the small grain by hand, so

Library of Congress

they sowed the corn in like manner. Thirty-eight acres were cleared on the eighty acre farm. Mr. Myst and Mr. Daubenton grew very weary doing farm work and told father from time to time that he had the easiest job in building the home. Father drew 34 the plans, figuring the costs, buying and picking out the lumber. When time permitted, he assisted the men with the building of the house.

The men told Father it was to be his duty to sow the corn. He agreed to do so. Someone told him two bushels of seed corn would be a great plenty. The two sacks were soon empty and the largest part of the eight acres had to be sowed. They had reserved eight acres for corn. As it was getting on in the season, Father was in a hurry. He took a pail, then proceeded to sow the corn as he had seen the neighbors sow the small grain. In due time, the corn started to show itself. Passers by looked, stopped their teams, climbed out of their lumber wagons to examine the green plants. Some said the plants resembled corn, while others argued that it must be something the Hollanders brought with them. One day a neighbor came to the door to inquire if it really was corn. Father became furious, and said, "Yes, of course, it is corn," The good neighbor laughed as he told father corn was planted, now sowed like wheat. He advised him to get a neighbor to plow it under and sow millet seed in its place. "Oh No", said Mr. Myst, "We will pull some of the plants out so the corn will be spaced just right. We can use the clothes lines to make straight rows. Even though the women objected, the clothes lines were taken to the corn fields. They started early the following morning. It was a sultry day. When they returned home for the noon meal, they looked quite discouraged and their faces were red as plums and dirty too, besides they were very tired. Mr. Myst had followed the neighborhood fad by tying a red handkerchief around his neck. The men also had exchanged their light shirts for gray ones like all the farmers wore in the neighborhood. Father did not look any better then the other men.

35

When Mother saw the men as they walked wearily towards the house, she shook her head, These men came here only a few short months age to live a happy, carefree life

Library of Congress

in a beautiful country, She told father we were all throwing our money, time and efforts in a bottomless pit. Mr. Myst had owned a wholesale house of Men's Clothing and also had designed men's clothing. Father, as I said before, held a good position in Amsterdam. They did not look like the same men. Their faces were sunburned and seemed scorched. The men were discouraged too, but not nearly as much as the women, who said it was drudgery without a future.

They worked in the hot sun and picked out the little plants and placed them in a pile ready for transplanting. It made some of them reel from the heat by noontime, so father suggested they would rest for two hours, now that all the plants had been gathered. After the sun had blazed down on leaf and root of the tiny plants, they were too lifeless to draw nourishment from the soil in which they were transplanted. In the afternoon, brother John and Frank Myst came in the house very much excited. They told the women to come to the corn field, The corn was wilted and they were positive every plant would die. The neighbors told father corn plants could not endure transplanting. So they hired a neighbor to plow up the field and replant it as it should be done. When the field was put in shape, there was no seed corn to be obtained anywhere, so we no corn crop the first year.

Even though we were lonely and discouraged, everyone took hold hoping some day we would see days or the men would see their mistake trying to farm, and would go back to 36 Amsterdam or move to Minneapolis or St. Paul. Our chief enjoyment was the letters came from our dear relatives, who were so faithful in writing us the family news. Our parents were happy the children were well and enjoyed the country, the forests, flowers and birds, which seemed to intrigue us.

Our Sabbath was a day much different from other days. It was truly a day of rest. Mother prepared as much of the food on Saturday as possible, and the house was thoroughly gone over. So early on Sunday after the breakfast dishes were washed, we cleaned up, put on our clean Sunday dresses. With a clean hankie in our pockets and best hair ribbon in our hair, we were ready for the day. All the Holland families were religiously inclined,

Library of Congress

so on Sunday, we had our regular church service. We sang a few Dutch Psalmns. One of the men offered prayer and then read a sermon. We had our organ, and several in our group played very well. Sometimes we had our service outside under the trees. The men carried the organ outside. As we sang, the forest in the back of the house resounded the echo of the many voices. It was an expensive thing to bring that organ from Holland, but it brought us much joy and comfort. Mother had a very sweet voice and we spent many happy hours as we sang together. The men sawed blocks of wood two and a half feet high and laid boards from one block to another. We took out old blankets to cover the boards. These were our seats.

The neighbors passing by and hearing our singing came to listen. They could not understand the sermon, but knew we worshipped God. Later on, they brought some hymn books. Father had taught us notes and in a short time, we were all singing American hymns together. The 37 backs, both large and small, grew dreadfully tired while we listened to the long drawn out sermons of a wise theologian.

One time when Mr. Myst finished reading an unusually fine sermon, he said, "A beautiful deep sermon," as he placed the book on the little table. Brother John turned to Mother as he said, "It was five miles deep". After the service, the men carried the organ into the house while the women prepared the dinner, and the children gathered up the hymn books.

In the afternoon, we took long walks through the forests and gathered flowers. We counted the number of different birds we saw, also squirrels. There was the large black squirrel and the medium gray squirrel, also the common red stripped squirrel we frequently see today. Then, too, there were many rabbits. Once in awhile, we would see a deer. They were quite wild and ran away when they saw us. One time, I wandered away from the group and was lost in the woods. Our parents had told us if we ever got lost to break off branches as we went along. It did not worry me very much, for I felt confident they would follow my trail. It was but a short time, and we were happily reunited. When we returned from our

Library of Congress

little walks, Mother served delicious cold milk and cookies. We bought our milk from the neighbors for as yet father had not built a barn or bought cows, oxen, horses, or hogs. We had a few chickens.

You may have wondered how we bathed since everyone knows that bath tubs were practically of in the log cabins or country homes. We had a very large wooden tub, so early on afternoon, our Mothers started heating in the boiler. Whenever clean water was 38 poured in the tub, other water was brought inside and added to the water in the boiler so it was refilled. An especially smooth board was placed across the tub for the older children. The smaller children crawled right into the tub and loved to play in the water. And so far into the night this bathing ordeal and heating of water continued. Of course, in summer the men went to the creek. There was a certain place which was especially nice for bathing. We received strict orders from our parents not to throw glass in this particular spot. The creek had a good sandy shore. Many evenings, the men would don overalls and go bathing in the lake. They felt so refreshed after a hard day's work. They urged the women to go too, but they were positive it was not ladylike to enter such sports. So our Mothers gave us sponge baths at night, tucked us in bed, and while the men were gone, enjoyed a sponge bath also.

Whenever there was sickness in the family, we had to use home made remedies, and depended largely on our own common sense. Mrs. Price taught us how to prepare slippery elm and landanum. She cut the slippery elm in bits, cooked it, mashed it with a fork until it was soft, then added a few drops of laudanum and injected this with a baby syringe, The following morning, we would feel much better, and our colds or sluggish system would be much improved. Today, the doctors teach us to eat the right food in order to stay well, giving us less medicine. We never heard of vitamins in those days. A doctor in Monticello, tongues had whispered that he had studied medicine all of three months in the east. In Clearwater, a Dr. Wakefield was called many times when the Monticello doctor failed to know what to do for patients, or when he was at a loss to know the 39 nature of the disease. Dr. Wakefield usually won out. He was older, had had more experience, and had

Library of Congress

studied medicine as many years as the Monticello doctor had months. Both men charged the same price. It was a dollar a mile. Charges were always made according to distance not for the time spent or work done.

In after years, we learned to admire these men a great deal. It was not easy to travel a dozen miles to our home in an old buggy, through intense heat or cold weather, over very poor roads. In later years, they used a cutter which was much more comfortable. Whenever the roads were drifted with snow, the doctor had to abandon the cutter and walk many miles to see their patients. We had no phones, and the farmers had to walk or drive their oxen twelve miles to call the doctor. Many times, he was out on another call and the farmer walked home, if he had not taken his team. When the doctor made his call, he was usually assured that he could have chickens, eggs, or if he had many calls, he was given a calf for his services. The doctor left the medicine to be taken by the patient; if pills were left, we wrapped them in paper and placed them in the cupboard. The medicine was handed to the one whose intelligence seemed of the highest mark. One very two hours the doctor ordered. Sometimes the orders were reversed and the patient had two pills every hour. The doctor did not write down the directions, but merely told us, and so many times, we were confused.

Mrs. Price used to bring her bottle of medicine to relieve pain. It was mysterious, black liquid and had the essence of peppermint; it certainly worked like magic. Then we used the smooth round stones we found in the fields and woods. The Indians had discarded them.

40

There was a wide ridge around the entire stone where they had tied a rope. We kept these stones in the oven. Whenever anyone was ill or had a cold, we rolled the stone in a wool cloth or piece of blanket. It was quickly placed at the feet of the patient, which gave relief in most instances. You have your hot water bottles or electric pads these days, which I know is more convenient.

41

Chapter IV FALL, WINTER, AND THEN SPRING

My dear Children,

The latter part of the summer father, Mr. Myst, and Mr. Daubenton were busy building a granary to store our wheat. The neighbors harvested our wheat with the help of our men, who were all very anxious to learn how and when to cut the grain, then too, how to store it. It was not harvested as you see it done today, for it was real drudgery. Hay was cut with a crooked handled scythe. We had two large marshes on our farm, so there was an abundance of hay. An acre a day was usually the limit, and we were up before five o'clock in the morning, The wheat was cut with a grain cradle. I remember its scythe blade and its long wooden fingers to lay the grain in place for the men to rake and bind in bundles. In later years, we had a reaper attachment which was fitted to a grass mower, it laid the grain in bundles. Still later, we had a wire binder, and a reaper and mower combined. Many years later, we had a rake pulled by one horse. We also used a tread mill, but it was not satisfactory. Horses were hitched to poles and were driven around and around.

We plowed the land with steel plows. In the early days, they used black steel plows. Two horses had to pull the plow. The threshing was done in early fall by horse power; it took six teams to set the machine in motion. The neighbors used to do exchange work, the women as well as the men. We made pies, stewed cooked big kettles of potatoes. The always liked to watch the hungry devour all the food. The cool air and exercise seemed to stimulate their appetites. Some of these neighbors chewed tobacco and shyly deposited their cud on the floor, Many were used to dirt floors in the log cabins. We were very particular about our floors. Even though we had not taken our carpets from Holland, we had good pine floors. Every morning after we swept and set the rooms in order, we wiped up the kitchen, living and dining room floors with clean soapy water.

Library of Congress

After the threshing excitement was a thing of the past, the men built a small log stable with a hay loft. Father wanted to purchase a few cows so we could have plenty milk for the family, and also butter.

During the winter: months, the settlers had more time for visiting and reading. Father lost no time in studying about America, the state of Minnesota and our little community. He found some very interesting facts for the family and also for the grand children and descendants, for he felt it was up to his kin to help settle and improve this particular part of Minnesota. I shall give you these facts, for I know it will interest you even though you have heard us tell the story of our early life in Minnesota a number of times.

The first white man in Silver Creek was a Mr. A. Downie who took a claim near the mouth of Silver Creek, about 1852. The First real settlers in Silver Creek was Joseph Loche, J.W. Sanborn, and Tom Melrose, who took claims in 1855. Joseph Loche came from the East. A saw mill, a small store, and a blacksmith shop were erected in 1875. Philip Loche came from the East. He inherited money from an uncle in England and offered a sum of money to the 43 denomination that would erect a church. The methodist took advantage of this offer and erected a building on Section 33 in 1863. Later, it was moved to Section 5. The generous gift from Mr. Loche had to be stretched for the building, furniture, and minister's chair and manse. Wood and sand rocks were hauled by the settlers. They also made a stationary pulpit, which turned out too high. Some preachers who came to preach the gospel were short, and we could hardly see more than their heads. One short, fat preacher asked for a box to stand on, so he could look over the congregation. The only box available was rather frail, and when he was in the midst of his sermon, he went through the box. The incident created a good deal of merriment. He, however, had a good sense of humor and made a joke of it. Another amusing incident I remember so well; the visiting pastor who came to preach for us was very tall. He wore high boots: it was a warm day so he removed his coat and vest. His sight was poor, so he had to stoop forward to read the Scripture. The strain on his suspenders removed first one button, than another

Library of Congress

button left his trousers. He kept one hand on his trousers in order to keep them in place. His congregation watched his trousers more than they did the preacher. Very few ministers who came to preach for us were very impressive, some shouted very loud about hell and damnation and told us little of the love of God. Mr. Loche purchased second hand Bibles and hymn books for the church. My father led the singing. Mr. Henneman was an elder in the church and an earnest worker. Whenever we had evening services, we set a lantern on each side the platform. The chimneys of the lanterns blackened on one side which gave more 1 in the church auditorium. Rev. J.B. was the first pastor.

44

Monticello, just twelve miles from Silver Creek, was a thriving little town, but had no grist mill. However, it had a ferry across the Mississippi. The first settlers told many wierd stories of how the Indians came to scalp the people. The settlers hurried to the Fort which was built there for protection. This was before we came to America. Father learned that as early as 1854, men by the name of Sam MoManus, S.T. Creighton, and Wm. Creighton purchased a claim from Mr. Practor, on which part of Monticello is located. Shortly after that the claims owned by Mr. W.G. McCrory and his son were purchased by James C. Beekman. There were some two hundred and ninety-nine acres were surveyed, plotted, and recorded as the town of Monticello. Settlers told Father there were only a half a dozen families within eighteen miles on the west side of the river. At this time, the entire section of the country was called Cass County; it was not organized. Later on, the County of Wright was organized and Monticello was the county seat. Buffalo is the county seat at present.

During the winter months, many men went up north to the pine woods to get pine lumber for a saw mill, then orders were sent east for the machinery in 1856. The machinery arrived and in the spring of 1857 the mill was in operation. The people boasted that it cost \$15,000. There were three buildings in the town at that time besides the mill, a home, a sort of hotel, also a log cabin belonging to Wm. Creighton. Chas. King of St. Anthony purchased the mill. Soon he purchased what was called a stock of logs and commenced

Library of Congress

turning out real lumber. The settlers were very much excited and had hopes of having 45 real homes instead of log cabins. Shortly after that time, Mr. T.G. Mealey came to Monticello and opened a general store. George and A.C. Riggs had claims, had it plotted and named it Lower Monticello. The two towns were hardly one fourth of a mile apart. A saw mill was erected which they claimed cost \$21,000 and which cut about 25,000 feet of lumber a day, also shingles and laths. Mr. King boasted this mill was the best in this section of the country. Woodman & Co. owned the mill in Lower Monticello. It was operated by steam.

In the summer of 1852 two young men, Herbert McCrory and F.M. Cadwell were charmed with the beautiful scenery and fertile soil of Monticello vicinity. They carefully selected claims. Mr. McCrory's claim was in section three, west of the town. Mr. Cadwell's claim was about two miles above, on section thirty-two, Mr. Row Brasie, who came from Wisconsin in July 1854 located on section nine, later on by G.W. Herrick. Later that summer the settlement was enlarged by the following newcomers, J.B. Rich, James Marden, Robert Ford, Henry Carr and Chas. Davies. All took claims within two miles of the present village. These settlers sold their claims within a year except Mr. Rich, who made considerable improvement.

Mr. Riggs established a ferry across the Mississippi. His brother, Geo., bought half interest in the ferry.

The following year, more settlers came. Augustus Mitchell, H.H. Helm, H.S. Brasie, Ira Hoar. In 1855 Z.M. Brown, Tom Anderson, C.S. Boyd, Ambrose Bryant, Alexander Mitchell Royal Marsh, Chas. Sydlinker, John Whitcomb. Then Sam E. Adams, C.W. Clarey, T.G. Mealey, Henry Kries, The Stokes, and Waldon families came. The very first store opened in Monticello was by James and Tom Chambers in the residence of Mr. Geo. Brown.

Library of Congress

In 1857 a ferry was established by John Gellow, later owned by Mr. C. Jones. That same year a small school house was erected and E.W. Merrill taught the youth of the village. Later O.C. Gray was the instructor.

In 1856 Harvy Brookins came from Illinois and started a livery stable, later Mr. P. Titis and J.W. Hanaford owned it. Geo. Knowlton and Geo. Libbey opened the first blacksmith shop in 1856.

The first white child born in Monticello was Fred Anderson, who was born in the fall of 1855. John Riggs was born in December of the same year.

The first marriage was performed about 1856, A.S. Descent and Miranda Chandler, also F.M. Cadwell and Elizabeth McCrory.

The first hotel was opened in 1857 and called the Cataract House., Mr. Cross was the manager. It was located near the lower ferry. Later it was destroyed by fire.

In 1870 Wm. Tubbs built the first flour mill and was located near Mill Creek, Just west of the city limits. It was only 30x40 feet. It had three run of stones, two stories high. In 1874 Mr. K.G. Staples and J.W. Tennison bought it and conducted a fine business until 1879 when the mill was destroyed by fire. In 1880 Mr. Chas. Janney erected a larger mill. H. Bliss and C.W. Clarely built an elevator in 1870. It was changed to a grist mill with two run of stones. It was destroyed by fire in 1877. Ben Bradford built a tannery but was in business only a short time.

The postoffice in Monticello was established in 1855. G.W. Gerrish was Post Master for 47 twelve years when C.E. Kries took over the work.

Monticello was first incorporated March 1, 1856. Wm. Creighton was the first Justice of the peace. J.B. Rich the first constable. In May 1858 the first supervisors to be elected were H.H. Helm, chairman. W.C. Williams and A. Stuart; Clerk. Lyman Case: Assessor, H.

Library of Congress

Houlton; Collector, W.S. Brookens; Justice of the peace Sam Bennett and T.G. Mealey. One hundred and twenty-seven votes were cast at that election.

The congregational church was organized in March 1856. Rev. J.C. Whitney held religious services there in the home of N. Fletcher before the church was organized. Twenty-two charter members were enrolled. Rev. Hicks was the first pastor, Then came Rev's. Griswolt, A. K. Fox, A.V. House, O.M. Smith, Rev. Jenks. Rev. Cutler.

The Baptist Church was organized also in 1856 by Rev. L. Atkinson. In 1874 a church building was erected and completed in 1875, Rev. Weeks was the first pastor. He remained two years, 1860–1862. Rev. G. Bills came in 1866. In 1873 Rev. M. Blowers came and remained for many years.

The Methodist church was organized under the ministration of Rev. S. Creighton in 1856. A building was erected and dedicated in 1857. The following pastors served in the order given: Rev's. Noah Lathtop, Win. Shelly, S.T. Sterritt, Whiting, A. Welch. Perrigim. D. Brooks, H.J. Shaffner, L. Collins, Shank, Thomas Day, J. Teter, L. Gleason, M. Smith. Thats as far as my list goes.

48

Wm. Chandler assumed the expense of building an Advent Church in 1868. Rev's Collins, M. Welcome and C. Fellows served as pastors.

The Lodge No. 16 A. F. and A. M. was organized U. D. in 1856 and received its charter January 1857.

In 1858 the cemetery association was organized.

The first and only news paper published in Wright Co. for many years was the Monticello Times. C.M. Kenton was the first publisher. In 1857 Geo. Gray purchased the equipment.

Library of Congress

In 1866, the year before we came from Amsterdam, the state of Minnesota had only one hundred and five miles of railroad. This was owned by five different companies. The longest line was only twenty-six miles long. Soon after that year the railroads built more lines for many people wanted to go west. Wood was used for firing the train engines. Cord wood cut in half would be placed along the track through each town, and the engineer and fireman loaded up to capacity whenever they came to a town.

The people coming west seemed to like this frontier life and soon cleared land, raised vegetables, wheat, and a little corn. There was always plenty fish in the lakes. In winter, men would trap muskrats and minks, also rabbits.

Some of the early settlers were Chas. Coombs, Andrews, Fergesons, Bryants, Grants, Morris and Walker. Later on came Pullins, Day Carters, Moodys, McKenzies, Coys, Hubbard, Mrs. Rowell and daughter Mrs. Fee, Mr. Salisbury and last, but not least, our group from Holland who came in 1867. A. Henneman lived in Clear Water 49 some fifteen miles away. Somehow he seemed to belong to our group, for he was with us much of the time. He was a sincere church worker. Mrs. Rowell was not only a beautiful woman, but was kind and helpful to everyone.

In 1866 a railroad known as Breckenbridge Division of St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manetoba was located through Wright Co. In 1868, a track was laid as far as Delano; the following year, it was completed as far as Cokato. It was difficult to believe that only a few short years before this time this part of Minnesota was a vast wilderness, almost uninhabited by white men. There were no wagon roads to speak of, just Indian trails. In 1854 the early settlers tried to make rough trails like wagon roads, but they were unimproved, we were told.

We were surprised to learn that in Richmond, Va. in 1857 there was a regular negro market. No. 1 men extra cost \$1,450 to \$1,550. No. 1 good women extra good, sixteen to twenty-two years of age sold for \$1,200 to \$1,250. No. 1 good men \$1,200 to \$1,250.

Library of Congress

No. 2 common \$1,110 to \$1,150. No. 1 boys four feet high \$500.00 to \$550.00. No. 1 boys, four feet three inches high \$650.00 to \$675.00. No. 1 boys, five feet six inches sold for \$1,200 to \$1,250. No. 1 girls, four feet \$500.00 to \$550.00. Girls four feet six inches \$750.00 to \$800.00.

The first fall and early winter, the men in our group had time to brood over our new way of living and the price they were paying for this mere existence. The scenery was beautiful, the air fresh and pure, but that did not compensate them for the drudgery and misery they had to endure. They figured too that thirty-eight acres of cleared land was not 50 enough to keep all of them busy. The farm could not produce enough to support all thirty-two people. They did not want to purchase more land. So, as time went on, there was more and dissatisfaction.

When the only doctor in Monticello moved away, Dr. Camhout decided to open up an office in that town. He had learned the English language in school, even though it was faulty, he knew he would get along with the people in the community. The people were very happy to have a doctor in their midst, and soon he was well established. Dr. Camhout was the first one to leave our group. This gave the others courage and soon the eldest son of Mr. Myst secured work in a tailor shop in St. Cloud, Minnesota, which was twenty-six miles west of Silver Creek. The men walked the twenty-six miles many times. Wm. Myst had worked in a clothing store in Amsterdam. He was handsome and wore his clothes well, so he had no difficulty in securing a position. Mr. Myst's second son soon found a position in Mealey's store in Monticello. They were very happy to receive a reward for their work.

Mr. Myst soon moved to Clear Water with his family. They lived there some four years and then moved to St. Cloud, Minnesota. We visited them occasionally and were overjoyed to see them. Frank Myst later on was connected with one of the Minneapolis Daily papers.

Library of Congress

My brother Dick who had been employed by the Rowell family secured a position on a stock farm owned by C. King, located near Minneapolis. The next ones to leave us were the Van Hakeron men. Even though they had money, they wanted to live where things in general looked more prosperous. They reminded father many times that our neighbor Mr. Salesbury who had bees ⁵¹ and sold honey made more profit from his bees from his farm.

This set the older men to thinking and by the time the first snow came, Mr. Myst and family, Daubenton family, and De Leewens had talked father into buying the other land they had purchased. Since he was determined to help settle and build up this part of Minnesota. Father hated a quitter or slacker. He said he knew every year would find the country much improved. They needed patience and endurance.

The Daubenton family were the last ones to leave us, so the Braats were the only ones left on the farm and to occupy the large house.

Mother told me it was then more than any other time she wanted to pack our belongings and return to Holland or a more comfortable climate. She knew we could stay with her father, Grandpa Das. Father would be able to secure a position. This unending drudgery was too much for her. The isolation was worse than the drudgery. She told father time and again he was putting more money into the farm than he ever could expect to get out of it. She called it a bottomless pit. It cost a large sum of money to get started and no money coming in. We ate the eggs, drank the milk, had wheat ground for flour, and the corn ground up for corn meal mush and corn bread. We never saw money. Father realized it all very well. He was a proud man, but he had come here for a purpose and intended to fulfill that purpose. All our relatives and friends advised him not to go to America. He was not the adventurous type and they felt sure the land agent had only told him of the advantages but had neglected to tell him of the hardships they would have to face in America. Since he had decided to take ⁵² his family to America, he resolved to return to Holland some day

Library of Congress

for a visit. He would show the relatives his children would be educated in this new country. People weren't all Indians here.

I might add here that he never returned to Holland to visit his relatives and friends. However, three of his grand children had the pleasure of visiting our kin, also seeing the homes and places of business where our people lived and worked. It was my son William who made the trip in May, 1903, and returned in September of that year. The following year Dick Vandergon's son John visited in Holland. Sister Mary's daughter Johanna was the next one to make the trip in 1905. In 1938, sister Mary's youngest daughter Lucie spent four and one-half months with the relatives.

The emptiness that made a place for bitter woe crept through our hearts as all our friends left for different and better work. The large house with its many empty rooms seemed very spooky. It was then that our sun went down and darkness seemed to gather over us. Where were we to find companionship? We felt forsaken in the monstrous big house, we fairly rattled around when we walked in the different rooms, especially the rooms upstairs. Our nearest neighbor was an elderly lady.

When the hard winter set in it got down to fifty below zero. The house was cold. The animals in the barn were suffering too. Father put straw and hay on the roof of the log barn and banked it up on the outside with some three feet of dirt. Many wild blizzards came and left us that winter, snow drifts were some twelve feet high, and we were snow bound for weeks at a time. It almost seemed useless to dig ourselves out. Before we had dug a path to the neighbors, another blizzard was upon us.

53

The school house, District 16, was some three miles from our home. It was near a pretty lake. In this building we were to receive our education. Our very best clothes were in the box with the silver and jewelry which was stolen. The coat I had worn in Holland was by this time far too short for me, both in length and sleeve length. My hands seemed to

Library of Congress

dangle out of the sleeves, even though Mother tried to lengthen them. Father bought wool yarn in Monticello so Mother could knit wristlets for the children to fill in the space. The only yarn available was an ugly red yarn. Mother said it was home spun yarn. She also had to use yarn of this color and quality for our hose. I did not mind the ugly red wristlets, but the red hose were not very dressy. I knew I cried every morning as I dressed. They made my legs itch and made me fidgety in school.

The Locke family lived a mile and a half from school. During the cold winter months we used to stop at their home to warm up. Mrs. Locke always gave us a glass of warm milk and a cookie. She opened the oven door, so we could warm our feet, which of course gave us chill blaines, so not only did our legs itch but our feet burned and itched also.

We walked through snow knee deep to the little school house, District 16. Teachers had to board in the homes of the pupils. Many of the homes were small and it caused quite an inconvenience. Children had to sleep on floors, sometimes there were not enough blankets, but the teachers were always very kind and patient, always ready to help with the work. We enjoyed having them stay with us, we asked many questions about our faulty English for we were so anxious to learn to speak correctly. The teachers gave us books and how we worked and figured out the words. If we weren't certain about the pronunciation, we felt free to ask her. We soon learned to read our English Bible and memorize not only verses but chapters. Father said it would not only help us spiritually but teach us good English as well. Later on our teacher gave us a copy of Pilgrims Progress. Although the teachers were given very little pay, they gave much of their time in teaching the settlers culture and understanding, little hints about dressing, making collars so they were a great inspiration to us all.

Clothes for the growing children was a real problem. Mother seldom went to Monticello and father had to purchase our shoes also dress material as well as the general shopping. Mother made our coats, dresses, and the suits for the men. I remember so well the time father purchased a pair of shoes for me. They were the real lumber jack type. The store

Library of Congress

keeper told father that was what all the children in America were wearing, besides it was all he had to show him. When Mother and I looked at them, we both seemed to think the same thing. We were heart sick and were certain he was getting rid of some old stock. The shoes could not be exchanged for it would be many weeks before father would go for supplies. My shoes from Holland were made of soft leather. They however were too small for me, especially when I had to wear the red woolen hose. It hurt my pride to wear these lumber jack shoes, so I chose to wear the shoes from Holland, even though they pinched my feet and I froze two toes the first cold winter we were in Minnesota.

Many neighbors came to spend the long winter evenings with us. They enjoyed hearing about our native country and trip across the ocean.

55

In turn, they related stories of the Civil War, the horrors of the war and Indian scares. We children listened with interest. Soon the first winter in Minnesota was a thing of the past, and we looked forward to spring and the coming of flowers and birds.

Father was very anxious to do his own sowing and planting, for he felt he had learned a great deal the summer before. Very early in the spring, he sent to Holland for seeds, they arrived in due time. It gave us a great thrill to open the packages.

Some of the days were very dull after our friends left us, but we figured out different ways to amuse ourselves. One day, I slipped upstairs, dressed up in father's best broad cloth suit and my brother's white shirt. I wandered around outside and noticed the ladder standing against the barn, so I decided to climb up the ladder and inspect the hay loft. I felt important, these long breeches made me feel like a man. The odor of the fresh hay seemed to urge me to sit down and build air castles about going back to Holland when I was grown up. In no time, I was sound asleep. Very suddenly, I was awakened by strange sounds. I heard Mother's voice calling me. I rushed to the little window in the hay loft. There I saw my folks and a few neighbors searching for me. Father and my brothers with

Library of Congress

sticks and poles were fishing in the creek in front of the house. At first I wondered what all the commotion was about. Finally my sleeping brain cleared up. I glanced at the suit o I knew father would be very angry with me for wearing his best suit, but decided to face the music. Come what may, I would have to go down that ladder sooner or later. I stepped on the top step and came down with a thud. The pet dog had walked against the ladder and evidently had moved it. 56 He paid the price for I landed on him. There were no bones broken, and father was so happy to see me alive that he didn't scold me about wearing his suit. He dropped his rake and poles, ran up the little hill, took me in his arms and showered me with kisses.

Our second summer found us quite fearless for we knew what to expect. We possessed a team of oxen, a wagon and many tools father needed very badly. I remember so well the time father drove the oxen in front of the house, hitched to a wagon. In no time I was in the wagon box, hoping to have a ride. Father stepped into the house to tell Mother where he was going. The oxen started running. I hollered, "Gee Haw; Whoa", over and over again, but nothing changed their minds. They finally ran into the creek and the box of the wagon came off the running gear. The oxen with the running gear went on and on, while I sat in the wagon box afloat, wildly screaming for help. I was afraid I would go down stream. In a short time, father came to my rescue. So many comical things happened from time to time to each one of us. Perhaps we did not laugh at them when they happened, but when our Holland friends came to visit us we told them and they thoroughly enjoyed hearing of our experiences.

Sister Mary helped Mother a great deal with the house work. I was younger and ran errands for Mother, got the vegetables from the garden, cleaned them, picked berries, and gathered eggs. I loved the outdoors, The year after we arrived in Silver Creek, Mother and Mary were upstairs one day looking over some old clothes they might make over. Mother would rather make over our old clothes than to trust father to pick out some out-landish

Library of Congress

color 57 or material. I was always fascinated whenever I saw the things we had stored in boxes, relics, gifts our relatives gave us when we departed for America.

One day when Mother and Mary were working in the garden they gave me orders to feed the little chickens, but I decided it was the correct time to look through some trunks and perhaps take the old pistol and pretend I was shooting Indians or the wolf who howled during the cold winter nights. I found the pistol in no time rushed outside. It was the old story. I had no idea the pistol was loaded. I had told the old red rooster he was an Indian and I had to kill him. I pulled the trigger. To my surprise, it went off. How t screamed! Mother and Mary rushed from the garden, they saw the rooster jumping up and down flipping over and over. Brother John soon put an end to his misery, and we had a nice stew the following day.

The first summer Mother tried to raise chickens with the help and advice of the neighbor ladies. We children took turns in watching the little chickens so no harm could come to them when they were out during the day. One night we heard a dreadful noise in the chicken coop. It was very dark, but brother John and father saw objects moving about. After awhile, they were successful in sticking a pitch fork through the animal in order to hold him down, so they could kill him. The odor was unbearable. Their clothing seemed saturated with it also. The following day a neighbor informed us it was a skunk.

The next few years that followed, all things seemed to be a repetition of what had happened the year before. We had one very special event worth telling you about. On October 27, 1869, we had another baby, and we named him Henry. Since I was the youngest child, this was a novelty.

58

In 1870, father wrote an article about Minnesota, its beauty, our hardships, and its drawbacks, But he also wrote that if people had the backbone to take the hardships along with the adventure of helping to build up a country, life could be interesting. This

Library of Congress

article was printed in one of the local papers in Holland. Father wanted his friends to know he was taking it on the chin. This article interested a group of people in Amsterdam. A friend of our family had written for information concerning the country and its possibilities. The party lost a large sum of money, but he still had some seven thousand dollars left to invest. He had several children. He heard it would be easy to start farming or buy a small business with that amount. He wanted father to buy a good place for him. The report had come to him that uncleared land could be purchased for five dollars an acre and cleared land with house and barn would cost twenty dollars an acre. Father did not paint a rosy picture for him concerning the severe winters with one blizzard after another and all its hard work in summer. This man informed us the date the ocean liner would leave Rotterdam to convey his family across the ocean. I have forgotten the name of the boat, although I have heard it many times. We heard they left Rotterdam, but a dreadful storm broke loose, the gallant ship with its precious cargo rode into the far away, weather conditions were unfavorable. This brought discouragement to my parents, in fact, we all looked forward to their coming. We had room in our big house to give them a home until they found a farm.

The following year, father, added a few more acres to the corn field by cutting down trees and breaking the soil. We needed the wood for heating and cooking purposes. Mary and I had to help hoe corn that spring and hill it up. This loosened up the ground and also removed the 59 weeds. It was tiresome work, especially when the sun was warm. Our corn crop, although small, was good that year, which encouraged father very much.

After living in Silver Creek a few years, we heard that cranberries could be sold for a good price, We had a cranberry marsh but did not realize its value. When our Holland friends came from St. Cloud for a visit, they urged us to pick these berries and sell them in Monticello or St. Cloud. We children shouted for joy for it was like finding a gold mine. The berries sold for four dollars a bushel. We picked a bushel of cranberries a day. This was the first money we realized from the farm. Our neighbors also told us to look for ginseng roots. We called it Ching Ching. The roots were used for medical purposes. Many

Library of Congress

farmers walked through the forests with a pick ax and sack on their backs. We found these roots on our farm and also brought them to a Monticello store. Later on, brother Dick took them to Minneapolis when he drove the stage coach from Monticello to Minneapolis. We received better prices for them in the city.

The second year we lived on the farm, we learned how to gather Maple sap each spring of the year. The settlers told us that the Indians used bark or reed spouts in the earlier days. We used the wood or iron spouts. Iron kettles is served for boiling purposes. We started early each spring to pick our best trees. Usually when trees are thirty or thirty-five years of age, they give the best sap. They were tapped about two to three feet above the roots. The holes were bored into the trunk with an upward slant; in this way the sap flowed from the tree more easily. Spouts were driven into the holes and buckets were hung on the spouts, We never tapped the trees in two places. It did not injure a tree to be tapped. The trees gave us an average 60 of ten to fifteen gallons of sap during the season, but it took many gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup. Mother estimated it took some thirty gallons of sap to make six pounds of Maple sugar or one gal. syrup. The settlers told us that the sugar content of a tree depended greatly on the amount of sunshine the tree had the preceeding summer, also the size and number of leaves were of great importance. Every morning, we gathered the sap with an old horse or ox to drag a hand sled, on which we had a clean barrel. As we went from tree to tree, we emptied the Maple sap into the barrel and rehung the pails on the spouts. Some people boiled this sap outside in large iron kettles, but Mother boiled it on our cook stove while we helped to refill the stove with wood. Any impurities in the sap rise to the surface during the boiling period, and we carefully skimmed them off. When the syrup was thick, Mother strained it and poured it into stone crocks, and after the syrup was cooled, we kept the cracks in our cool cellar. When the buds appear on the trees, it is time to pull the spouts, for the buds need the nourishment from the trees.

“God certainly provides for his children” Mother used to say when we brought the fruit and vegetables from the garden. We always had a good supply of Maple syrup and

sugar on hand. Everything we planted grew, Still Mother pitied us for we missed so many advantages.

61

Chapter V MORE HOLLANDERS ARRIVE

My dear Children,

The summer of 1871 was extremely dry; very little moisture, no rain to refresh the gardens, plants and flowers. Along the creek where our home had been erected grew wild hay which we gathered for our animals. This creek was named Silver Creek on account of the clearness and depth of its water, and also the beauty of its scenery. Along the shore were large oak, maple, and elm trees which no doubt had stood there for more than a hundred years. The sumac trees back of the house gave a beautiful variation of colors in the fall of the year. The township was named for the creek. Many farmers told father we had the choice farm in the neighborhood, but we did not feel we had a wonderful place. We had to fight the mosquitoes, hornets and deer flies. We heard the wolves howl at night and many times saw wild cats and bears. From time to time we saw deer and they used to eat our cabbages, then go over to the creek to drink water.

In September, 1871, father and my brothers put up several stacks of wild hay along the marshes bordering the creek. It was a trying task, but they were very happy to have the hay, for we had acquired a few more cows and would need the hay for the animals during the winter. Our joy was short lived for one morning we woke up and noticed smoke. A neighbor came to the house to tell us our hay stacks were on fire. We, as well as the neighbors, rushed to the scene with pails of water and gunny sacks. As we approached the scene, we noticed one stack was in a big blaze. In no time, the dead grass took fire. We all carried pails of water from the creek, 62 dipped the gunny sacks in the water and struck at the fire with the wet sacks. Others carried water and poured it on the grass

Library of Congress

surrounding the other stacks. We worked until evening; all had blistered hands, singed hair, and tired feet. The sun beat on our backs, and the blazing flames were in front of us.

The second day after the fire, the neighbors decided they would haul their hay home. It seemed the dry marshes were regular fire districts each year. Usually the farmers stacked the hay in the marshes than during the winter months when they were not busy, took the hay home. The following year, we had twenty-eight stacks of wild hay along the shores of the creek. Around the stacks, we made what they called back fires. This was done by making a circle of hay around the stack as close to the stack as permissible, two and a half or three feet between stack and circle, stray strands of hay were removed and stubbles pulled out to prevent fires. Farmers took pails of water and gunny sacks between the stack and the ring of hay, and another farmer stood on the outside. The hay ring was lit on the opposite side of the wind, especially if the wind was strong. Each one would keep the fire from the hay stack or the marsh at large. This method was used to keep the fire from coming to the stack as the weeds and hay protected our hay stacks so forest fires would not get to the stacks.

We had a fence around the growing crop. The neighbors' cattle as well as our own roamed at large. With our faithful dog, we had to watch the cattle so they did not get in our vegetable garden.

In some of the settlements, the young folks met at the different homes and danced during the winter evenings. Father had considerable musical ability, so invited the young people of our neighborhood to our house, and he conducted singing school. He taught them the notes and soon we were singing American songs. Our group grew in numbers. We met in different homes during the winter months. Father played his flute, we had organ music at our house. At the close of the evening, we had hot chocolate and cookies. We also had spelling school one evening a week. We who felt rather awkward with our Dutch accent were anxious to excel in something. Even though our English was faulty, our spelling was usually perfect.

Library of Congress

It was apparent that our family habits and language during our childhood remained Dutch to a great extent.

You have asked me to explain how the people dressed to keep warm during the cold winter months. The girls and women wore calico dresses. Our silk dresses were put away in a trunk; occasionally we looked at them. We did not want to wear silk dresses when all the women and children wore calico. The men had duck, jean, or cotton suits. These were made by the women. My Mother received instructions from Mr. Myst who was a tailor. The foot wear was mostly moccasins for the men. Our men wore knitted hose and moccasins over them. We were unable to buy overshoes for children in Monticello the first years we lived there. Many times we froze our toes when we walked to school. When the winters were severe, we had only five months of school during the year.

We were greatly excited one day when sister Mary received an invitation to visit a daughter of our neighbor who lived in Clear Water. It was her first outing since she had left Holland. The lady whom she was to visit was very handy with the needle. Her husband trapped wild animals, 64 also took calf skins and sent them to a tannery in St. Paul, Minnesota who tanned and sold the skins for them. However, many pieces had to be discarded for market. Mrs. Andrew Oaks made these pieces into mittens and neck pieces. She sold them to farmers, also storekeepers. She gave Mary a very lovely pair of fur mittens. Mary enjoyed her visit very much, but they brought her home wrapped in a blanket. Her face was as red as a beet. Her teeth chattered as she walked to the house. In no time, father set up a bed in the living room while Mary had both feet in the oven and drank a glass of hot milk. In due time, the doctor arrived, and a few days later, our house looked like a hospital ward. Our entire family, even our year old baby brother, Henry, had Scarlet Fever. Brother Dick had had it in Holland, so Mother knew how to care for us. This kept Mother tied down for six weeks caring for her little brood. The joy of getting well, having company, and being allowed to visit the neighbors made us very happy.

Library of Congress

Mr. Daubenton who lived in St. Cloud was one of our very first callers. He was a baggage man for the railroad. He told us he worked less hours than father did and made much more money. Father admitted he could see he never could make money on the farm. Each year, he had put money into it. But he felt he was helping to build up the state of Minnesota.

One day, father conceived the idea he would raise more chickens. He decided he would start on a large scale in order to make it worthwhile. If he had a thousand hens, it would pay to take the eggs and spring chickens to St. Cloud. So he enlarged the hen house, bought the hens, and soon we were set up in the chicken business. Our neighbors called it hennery business. The trips to St. Cloud were often a big disappointment. 65 Poor roads blocked with snow found us with many frozen eggs before father reached his destination. Father took the frozen eggs home. The result was we had eggs in one form or another for several days. Mother made custards, beat eggs into the mashed potatoes, but we could detect eggs no matter how clever she was in seasoning the food. In the spring, the trips were very few, for father set the hens to get more chicks to lay more eggs. Then too, when the frost came out of the ground, the roads were impassable. We always helped Mother care for the chicks. Prices for eggs ranged from eight to eleven cents a dozen.

After the entire group left us, our family lived alone in the large Fort Lilla. We found it was impossible to heat and care for it, so father decided in 1872 to build a house better suited for our family. He would tear down the large house, and use the wood for a large barn and milk house. So in due time, the building of our new home was underway. The house was a short distance from Fort Lilla. Father found it very convenient to work on it in his spare time. It had two bedrooms upstairs, one bedroom downstairs, a large living room and kitchen, also a good sized pantry with long work bench and many shelves for dishes, pots, pans, and food. We also had a small front and back porch, Joining the kitchen, father built a work shop with a long work bench and place for his tools.

Across the road from our new home was a large grove of Maple trees, which protected our home from the strong winter winds. We were very happy with this new home. It was very

Library of Congress

homelike and better suited for our family. We moved into it in October, 1872. Later on, we built a very fancy gate in the front drive way and painted it white with green trimmings.

66

In 1873, we received word from Mother's sister saying that three young men, Denier Vandergon by name were planning to sail for America and Minnesota in the near future. The salesman from the United States urged these men to go to Becker, Minnesota. This town was about seventeen miles from our home. After waiting for some time, we decided the men had changed their minds and remained in Holland. Then one day, my brother Dick happened to be walking on Hennepen Avenue in Minneapolis and saw these young men. They were talking the Dutch language. He wondered if it might be these young men his aunt had written about. He immediately introduced himself and was happy to learn they were the young men we had been looking for. Of course, they were most happy to receive instructions how to get to Monticello and our home before going to Becker.

I shall never forget the night they arrived. It rained, thundered and lightened. Mary and I had been asleep for some time. It was Mary who woke me to tell me we had company, for she heard father and Mother talking and laughing, and she was positive she could hear strange voices downstairs.

At the top of the stairs we had a trap door. Suddenly it opened, and Mother's head could be seen above the stairway floor. In a subdued, calm voice she said, "Mary come at once. The young men from Holland have arrived and we must prepare a lunch for them". Gertrude must prepare the beds in the spare room. Sister Mary and I dressed hurriedly and tip toed downstairs. The living room door was ajar, and Mary had her first glimpse of her future husband. Mary turned to me and said, "I'll never forgive Dick for directing these men to our house. They will write the relatives in Holland how we are living". Somehow, I did not mind if the relatives found out how we had been fooled, for sooner or later they would hear about it. But Mother did not want her father and family to know what a big mistake they had made and the hardships we had to endure. To me, it was

Library of Congress

something of great interest to have these men burst into our dull lives. I had my eyes quickly focused on the dark haired, young man. They all looked so different from the farm boys in our neighborhood, who had large horny hands. We noticed at once they were educated and refined. One of them arose, walked to his satchel and took out the family photographs. They alluded to their parents as "Father and Mother", while the farm boys in our neighborhood referred to their parents as "Old Man" and the "Old Lady". Mother soon lit the little lamp and carried it into the kitchen. The handle on the lamp had a hole large enough so Mother could place her two fingers through the hole and in this way could hold it more firmly. Mother needed the lamp in the kitchen to prepare the lunch. It also was the lamp I needed to remake the beds upstairs, so I listened to our guests while Mother and Mary were busy in the kitchen. These young men came from Vlaardingen. They told father that John was twenty-five years of age. Dick was twenty-one and Hugh, twenty. They walked from Monticello carrying their heavy valises and coats, Their trunks were still in Monticello.

While the young men had lunch, Mother came upstairs with me where we used the candle lantern. We had brought our own kerosene lamps and hanging lamps from Holland. Candles were made from deer tallow. Our first lantern was a sort of can with a hole in it to give light from the candles. In this electric age, one can hardly believe the pioneers had to struggle along in this manner.

68

The following days, Mother and Mary were very much puzzled about what to feed our guests. We lived twelve miles from a store. Our horses worked so hard in the field doing spring work in the clearing that they were tired out in the evening and could not go to Monticello for food supplies. The food situation did not bother our guests; they ate heartily and praised Mother's cooking.

Mary and I had a wonderful time as we watched them unpack their trunks. There were dozens of home knit hose, some long and some short. They told us how John was

Library of Congress

supposed to study for the ministry. Their people were all professional. Their father a druggist, their grandfather a minister; also uncles and cousins. This was such an adventure. They informed us their sister Mary was twenty-four years of age, their brother Nicholas who was seventeen was attending college in Schiedam. Their sister Nelly was fourteen. This Nicholas became my husband in 1880. I will tell you more about our romance later.

The father of these boys promised his wife that sometime in the near future they would sell their drug store, house and the fishing ships they owned, and would sail for this wonderful America to visit their sons, and if they could find a suitable location would remain in America. The young men visited us for three weeks and then decided to go to Becker, Minn. as planned.

Dick, the twenty-one year old, had black, curly hair and blue eyes. He loved the scenery, especially the flowers. He went on hunting and fishing trips with some of the neighbors. This truly was an adventure for him and more fun than books and lectures. One day, father accompanied the men along the creek and they looked for deer tracks. They followed the tracks to the Plum Orchard. He shot a young doe and carried it home. We were all so tired of eating chicken, eggs, and fish, how we hailed the change. The young men also enjoyed the croaking of frogs, the hooting owls, the fire flies and music of the orioles. It was ideal spring weather and the moon gave us the best of its silvery lights. In the evening after the work was finished, we sat outside on the benches. John Vandergon entertained us many evenings, reciting poems and speeches he had memorized. It awoke in our souls all things grand that had been dormant since we started laboring here.

So now we knew we would miss the young men, They had enjoyed their visit. They had always lived in Vlaardinga. Their father who was druggist prepared the medicine and rolled the pills. In those days, many plants and herbs were sold to druggists. They were run through a certain process and placed in air tight containers, so the medicine would be fresh when the doctors needed it.

Library of Congress

I told you before how we held our church services at our house mainly because we felt it was too far to walk to the little methodist church, and we were unable to procure a preacher each Sunday. So the neighbors decided each would take turns in having services in their homes. So every Saturday, chickens were killed and dressed, cookies, cakes, and bread baked, and fruit juice was served for a refreshing drink.

I must tell you of the appetizing fruit juice Mother learned to make. Fruit Jars were not available, but we had gallon stone jugs. Mother sterilized them thoroughly, boiled the fruit, strained the juice through sacks and boiled it again, filled the jugs, then hammered the corks 70 securely in the opening and sealed the jugs with sealing wax. In case we ran out of corks, we used clean corn cobs. We always had wild strawberries, grapes, apples, plum, and cranberry juice. We picked the grapes on the deserted farm. These jugs were stored in our cool cellar. Along the creek grew wild bush cranberries in trees the size of an apple tree. The berries about the size of currants grew in clusters and had flat seeds. Occasionally, we picked these berries for juice.

All through the summer, all things seemed to be a repetition of other summers. Hard work, meager income, and mosquitoes full of vim and poison. Then one day, a letter came from the Vandergon boys stating that Hugh, the youngest, was ill with Typhoid Fever. They had no-one to care for him and their employer's wife was not able to give him the care he needed. They wanted to bring him to our house, so once more our home turned into a hospital and we nursed him back to health. I remember so well the day they arrived. I was working in the garden, and brother Henry who was four years old came with a pail and told me we needed many potatoes for the Vandergons had arrived. It was a very warm day. I wore an old fashioned sun bonnet, my neck, face and hands were wet with perspiration. As I picked up the potatoes with my damp fingers, Mother Earth clung to my hands. I stopped to look at the large, well formed potatoes. I knew we had always taken these fruits and vegetables for granted in Holland. I understood now why Mother said, "God careth for

Library of Congress

His children". In America we toiled for the things we had, but learned how they grew, how to plant and how to care for them.

For six weeks, Hugh was very ill, but with the doctor's care and Mother's nursing, he was able to be up in due time. Brother Henry contracted the Typhoid fever that same summer. So 71 we lived through the same ordeal. He was a small child and it was so difficult to make him stay in bed. Naturally, we all expected to have our turn, but Mother was the only one who had a light touch of the disease. Although she insisted she was only over tired and over worked. Hugh occupied the only bedroom downstairs, Henry was upstairs because she did not want Henry to give us the germs. Hugh remained at our house while the other two Vandergon boys worked for the farmers to earn their room and board and at the same time looked for farms. They loved the beautiful scenery and did not mind the hardships. They came from intellectual stock, and the enrichment of the mind and intellectual powers counted higher than physical strength. They, like my father and brother Dick, had studied different languages; Holland, French, German and English.

As time went on, we could see that Dick Vandergon definitely was still the man who loved the great outdoors. Summer as well as winter scenes contained much beauty and charm for him. So he roamed the woods and studied birds, flowers, and plants during his spare time.

On Sunday, the boys gathered at our house to visit with Hugh, tell their experiences and exchange letters from Holland, any of us received.

One day, the boys located a farm which was for sale some three miles south of our farm. It was the farm of Jacob Calvin. After writing to Holland for money, they paid twenty dollars an acre for the place. After they bought the farm, father asked John how they were going to manage the cooking, washing, and ironing. John admitted they hadn't thought of that, but he was certain they could get a woman to wash, iron, and bake for them on Monday and the later part of the week have her come to clean the house and bake up food 72 for

Library of Congress

several days. The Vandergons had always had maids in their home and had not found it difficult to find help. In America, the girls all remained at home to assist their Mothers with house work. John became very serious and told us if he had known help was so scarce, they would not have purchased the land. John was very intelligent. We wondered why a man, who when he heard a lecture or speech, would come home and repeat three-fourths of it, and who had such a command of language and vocabulary, had come here to dig in the dirt, fight against all ills and privation, and inter-mingle with many people who had no education whatsoever. Hugh was a quiet, reserved person, could draw beautiful pictures, and draw machinery to perfection, and color it perfectly. Dick should have studied botony and taught the science of plants and flowers.

The first of March found the Vandergon boys eager and determined to tell Mr. Calvin to vacate the farm. They wanted to get ready for the early spring work every farmer talked about. They didn't know how to do the work, but felt confident the neighbors would advise them. The middle of March, the four large trunks, four small trunks, and carpet bags were placed in our lumber wagon and transported to the newly purchased farm. And so they started a new life. Their log house was only a few feet from the place where their remains are peacefully sleeping. Here they started a new home and later on they sold that piece of ground for a cemetery. In later years as they passed on they were taken to the place they chose for a home. It is a beautiful spot overlooking the lake. This particular part of the farm was purchased by Nicholas Vandergon, my husband, who came from Holland a year later. As I stand by his grave, I think of the fifty-eight years we lived together and know we were happier than the average couple. We shared our problems and troubles. In looking over the past, there 73 was more joy than sorrow, during the many years we lived together.

As the year 1874 lengthened, we again received letters from two other families and three young men who wanted to come to America. One of the men was the youngest brother of the Vandergons, My father wrote letters describing the many hardships, severe winters, and poor housing conditions. But in April, 1874 in the dead of the night, we were awakened by newcomers from Holland, who hired a man in Monticello to take them to

Library of Congress

our farm. It was the Schermer family. They had six children and considerable baggage. Mr. & Mrs. Tenus Schermer were thirty-two years of age. Their children were Nelly, nine years old; Peter, eight years; Henry, seven; Elizabeth, six; Cornelius, four; and Jennie, two years of age. The Nyland family came from Holland at that same time. Mr. Nyland was about forty-seven; his wife, forty-five; a son Arthur was eighteen; a daughter Jennie, sixteen; Nelly, twelve; a son of nine; and a baby, two years of age. We took care of them for a few days, and then father took them to our Fort Lilla which was built for our colony of Hollanders. We set up an extra heating stove and they bought a cook stove. We had swept and cleaned the house a week before they came, for we knew it would give them much more room than if we cared for them like the Price family cared for our group. Mr. Nyland soon purchased a farm across from the school, District 16 overlooking the lake from Mr. Lambert. It was known as the Warren Walker farm. The Schermers also bought a farm, but the house was too small for their family. They immediately bought lumber and building material to build a large home. The little house was only 10 x 14 in size and had a "lean to" which was used for a kitchen. It was a tumble down affair of uneven logs with large spaces between the logs. The ceiling was only six feet from the ground. I say ground for the log cabin 74 had a dirt floor. It seemed no time before the new house was under construction.

Nathaniel Drew had owned this farm Section 8 but was happy to sell it. He was only twenty-five years of age, and he married a girl thirteen of years. We were amazed at the child marriages in those days, although we never heard of divorces. We were all excited about the new Schermer home. Everyone pitched in to help during their spare time. It was truly a friendly neighborhood. It seemed that after a time, the newcomers fitted themselves into this new frontier life and became part of it.

Whenever there was sickness in a home, the neighbors had a snow shoveling bee, so the doctor could get to his patient. Then there were grain sowing bees in case the farmer was

Library of Congress

ill. The women came with cooked food. Many times there were corn planting or husking bees.

In the spring of 1874, a young man was seen trudging along the uneven country road, carrying two large valises and a heavy overcoat; in fact, he was loaded down like Bunyon's Pilgrim. He shifted the heavy valise from one hand to the other, even before the first hand was sufficiently rested. He wore a light spring coat and carried the heavy coat over his shoulder. He set part of his load down on the ground as he went to a little farm home and inquired if he was on the right road to the Vandergon farm which they had purchased from Jacob Calvin. He was answered by a Swedish lady who called loudly for Christina. She told him where Silver Creek could be found. "You will find a mill there", she told him. The young man had new hopes as he picked up his grips and started on his way. After inquiring at a few more homes, he at last lauded in the home of his brothers. You can well imagine how 75 happy the boys were to see each other. They had been working in the field breaking new land, so they could put it under cultivation. They said they were breaking plows instead of land. The old horses the boys had purchased from Mr. Calvin were not equal to the task of pulling the plow into the large stumps, They did not have enough experience to know they should drive around the stumps or loosen them. The stumps were green, for the trees had just recently been cut down. Many times, they had to unhitch the team and put them on the plow beam in order to pull the plow out.

The Vandergon boys had never written about the hardships and many inconveniences; instead, they described the beautiful scenery and told of the rich, black soil, and of the friendly neighbors. This young man Nicholas was amazed at the way his bachelor brothers lived. He agreed with them that the country was beautiful, but how could they endure this way of living he asked. Their Mother had an orderly home and two maids to assist her. He asked them why they had not written home how they lived and about the horrible meals they tried to cook? They confessed to Nicholas that if they had written home, their Mother would have worried. Nicholas would not have come, and they remembered so well that before they came, it took a great deal of coaxing and many bitter tears were shed before

Library of Congress

they received the consent of their parents to come to America. Friends discouraged them, and relatives insisted their father to continue to send them to college. But the salesman had them hypnotized. It cost their father a large sum of money to send these boys to America and buy the farm. They did not want to admit defeat, so it was up to them to make good, clear land, raise crops, and they too hoped as time went on that conditions would improve. Nicholas shook his head. He had been 76 to college a year and was to be a druggist and assist his father. He liked the profession and told them he did not intend to stay in America. This made the brothers angry. They told him he had always been pampered by their Mother and their oldest sister. No matter what they said, Nicholas would not unpack his belongings; instead, he wrote his father for money for a return ticket. He had heard much of the Braat family through his brothers' letters so decided to talk the situation over with their family. The boys told him Mr. Braat was building a house for Tenus Schermer three-fourths of a mile away (just north of the lake.) Nicholas soon found his way through the woods to talk to my father.

When father returned home that evening, he was very much enthused about this new addition to our now existing colony. Father invited all four Vandergon brothers to spend Sunday with us. We were to have the church service at our house on that Sunday. On Saturday, we killed an extra chicken, prepared more food, for the Vandergons were coming for two meals. Early Sunday morning found us busy setting the tables for the church guests.

Nine o'clock on Sunday, we saw the brothers coming up the path. Soon we were properly introduced to the newcomer, Nicholas Denier Vandergon. The brothers had worked in the field in the burning sun and were badly tanned, while Nicholas was very fair and had blue eyes and black hair. He wore a well fitted gray suit and white shirt. As I looked at him, I wondered if he would change in looks like our men and the other Vandergons after a year in Minnesota.

After the noon dishes were washed, we took it upon ourselves to show Nicholas our farm.

Fort Lilla was one place we showed him. We told him how conditions were when we first came to Silver Creek and how much land father had cleared each year. He seemed to be interested but no enthusiastic about our way of living. When we returned home, Mother served cold milk and cookies and as we sat in the living room, young Nicholas told us the story of his ocean trip. It was the 25th of April, 1874 that he took passage on the steamer, sailing from Rotterdam to New York. He, like ourselves, had a second class ticket. The third class or steerage, although cheaper, was not very desirable. The hour of departure was set according to the tides. High water being necessary to steam out to sea. Since they had to leave at a very early hour, he boarded the steamer the evening before his departure. There were a dozen first class passengers, only four in the second class, and close to three hundred who traveled third class. They steamed slowly to sea, came to anchor, and waited for the high tide. While they were asleep, the steamer went out to sea. The following morning there was no land to be seen. He said the meals, like ours, were very good on the boat.

The four second class passengers ate with the three engineers and three mates. This was most interesting. The Captain of the boat was a special friend of the Vandergons and had been raised in the same town with Nicholas, although the Captain was considerable older. These men were most friendly to the second class passengers. After crossing the North Sea, they soon reached English Channel so stopped and entered harbor of Plymouth or Porthmus. It was there they took in coal for the voyage. They stayed in England twenty-four hours and set out to sea again. In a few hours, they entered the Atlantic ocean. There was a difference in the color of the water in the Atlantic ocean. The waves too were much higher 78 and larger. It was very windy; the ship would put her nose in the ocean and many times it looked as though she would never rise up again. Steamers used sails as well as steam, that is when the wind was favorable for the sails. The ship made two hundred or two hundred and fifty miles in twenty four hours. In the second class all the

Library of Congress

men had separate beds but we slept in the same room. Only two of our group were sea sick.

The time passed quickly, Nicholas told us, when the weather was pleasant; the passengers walked on deck, made temporary friends, and played horse shoe or threw rings around a pin. Occasionally they saw smoke from another steamer in the distance, sometimes met a sailing vessel and occasionally saw whales spouting water. One time, they met a steamer from New York, The stopped and visited for some time. Since it was bound for Rotterdam, they sent their best wishes to the home folks. Imagine ships doing that in this day and age. They had good weather and a good trip, although it took four weeks. When they came to Doggersbank, which is quite close to America, there was a big fog and all out going steamers and ships had to pass over that bank, so it was somewhat dangerous. The steamers had to slow down to half speed, put on red and green head lights, and blow the steam horn every few seconds. The wind was strong and the sea was very rough. Waves came over the deck, especially in the front.

The passengers were excited and eagerly looked for land. They caught sight of a pilot boat bringing in a pilot to them as well as to every incoming steamer. In rough weather, the pilots had a difficult job, When they neared a vessel on which they had to go, they came along side the steamer in a little boat, which sometimes was far below and many times above the 79 deck of the vessel. When the pilot came on board, the people began to get restless and knew it was about the end of the ocean journey. They assembled their belongings, short friendships were broken, and goodbyes were said. When they were close to shore, doctors came and examined every passenger. Then officers came to inspect all luggage. Trunks packed with care were turned topsy turvy. Nicholas had three trunks. Officers looked through them, but did not throw anything out. The third class people were treated with little consideration. Their feather beds were ripped open to see if they had valuables hidden among the feathers. Nicholas said they landed at Castle Garden. It was an old time Fort, a large round building, inside were several hundred people. It was a

Library of Congress

place where a person could purchase souvenirs, exchange money for American money. Only people who had relatives or friends to meet them were allowed to leave the building.

They stayed in New York one night and were taken to the railroad station, where they paid a large sum of money for excess baggage. The conductor on the train warned them about pick pockets. Only one of the second class passengers stayed in New York. One went to Orange City, Iowa, a Mr. Druyvesteyn. It took three nights and three days to make the trip from New York to St. Paul. They stopped in Chicago to change depots and trains. Nicholas said he bought a ticket in Rotterdam straight to St. Paul, Minnesota. From there to Big Lake, then went to Monticello in a hack.

He was Unable to tell his brothers when he would arrive in Monticello, for no ticket agent could give him a definite date; so much depended on the sea voyage. Mail came only once a week, so that is why Nicholas carried his valises and heavy coat fifteen miles to the home of his brothers.

80

After Nicholas finished telling us of his trip to America, he informed us he intended to return to Holland as soon as his father sent him the money. He resented it very much that his brothers hadn't written them that they lived in a log cabin, that very little land was cleared, and that they had to cut down trees and haul them away if they wanted to raise a crop. There was only a little log stable where they kept a cow or two who furnished the milk and cream. The place was full of huge Maple trees. Their own cooking, even baking of bread, was usually a failure. John took a loaf of bread to a neighbor, Mrs. McKenzie, to ask her why it wasn't like the bread she made. "You must let the dough raise longer", she told John. He said the flies were so thick on the pan which contained the bread dough, he thought it was better off in the oven. Consequently, the dogs and chickens ate most of John's bread.

Library of Congress

The following weeks and months were very monotonous for Nicholas as he patiently waited for the letter and money from his parents, telling him when he could return to his home and resume his studies and live a normal life. In due time, a letter came but his request was not granted. His father told Nicholas he had had things too easy. They had spoiled him. They urged him not to go to America until he had completed his course in pharmacy. He had made his choice. The other boys had not complained, so he told him he could not judge conditions in so short a time. He at least would have to stay one or two years. He also promised that the family would come to visit them. He, in fact, said he intended to sell his house and business. So he was getting the fever too.

Nicholas reluctantly unpacked his trunks and had to help dig stones, cut trees, and assist with the house work.

81

The following winter, Nicholas came to our house frequently. One time he told us how the boys cooked meat. They had killed a cow in late fall, cut it up, and kept it frozen in a box outside. Then as they needed meat, they took a large chunk of frozen meat and cooked it in a huge kettle. They usually boiled it to shreds. Sometimes, they added rice to this water. Many times, they set the kettle on the stove containing meat and rice and then went to the field to work. When they returned at noon, the meat was burned. Then again there were times the fire went out and there was no food. Their once white shirts were white no longer. They had no cold starch so the collars hung limp. The bottoms were lost from their shirts and were seldom replaced. Spots of grease from cooking was evident on their clothing. They hated it, but what could they do about it?

Dick, the twenty-three year old Vandergon, disliked this way of living so he went often to visit the Nyland family who came in 1873. They were a happy family. It was not more than one mile from their bachelor home and how different it was. Their daughter Jennie was pleasant and friendly. The meals were good and the house was clean and orderly. They had mosquito netting in front of the windows to keep the flies out. Nylands brought

Library of Congress

their furniture from Holland so it was homelike, and he always looked forward to visiting in their home. In time, Dick and Jennie Nyland were married, so Dick stayed with the Nyland family that winter. Jennie did not have the inclination to go to the bachelors' quarters to cook, bake, and wash for all the men. Dick soon procured papers that he was owner of his share of the land purchased from Mr. Calvin. Then when he had his share of the land, he built a home a short distance from the other brothers. It was a beautiful spot, overlooking the lake.

82

He planted many lovely flowers, especially roses. The following May, their first daughter Mary was born.

My brothers Dick and John, Mary and I seemed to enjoy the American friends more than the Germans who lived east of us. We had lived in America eight years. We went to skating parties and neck tie parties. At the last named party, every girl took a piece of the material of the dress she wore to the party and made a neck tie. The neck tie was placed in a paper bag, and each male present had to pick a bag while blind folded, then find the owner of the dress. She was his partner for the evening. There were far more boys than girls in our neighborhood, so we were always short a few ties.

The women made their own dresses and many times it took twelve yards to make a dress. The dresses were long and full, and had many ruffles three or four inches wide. The skirts were so long that only the tips of the shoes were to be shown when they walked. If we had dared to show our long bare legs and knees or worn shorts like the girls do in this day and age, we would have been disgraced for life.

One of the interesting social affairs in the winter was the spelling school. Katie and Mary McKenzie seemed to excel in spelling. We tried very hard to reach the top notch, for we knew we still had that Holland accent. It was good practice for us to pronounce the words and then spell them.

Library of Congress

About that time, several ministers were sent to the little church to conduct services. They, however, seemed to have very little effect on the young people. There were some thirty-six young people in our community. A Rev. Blowers came from Monticello. He had a very sweet wife 83 and son, Frank. Also a Rev. Kries came in the year 1876. Rev. Blowers conducted revival meetings for a few weeks. He urged the people to be baptized and join the church. Every evening the church was filled. It was difficult not to have a regular pastor to look after the spiritual needs of the members. Rev. Blowers explained that if we were bonded together, we could help and support each other in the faith and hold our consecration meetings. Elder Harrison of Clear Water came many times and did much work in trying to build up the church.

After the revival meeting, a big baptismal service was held in the creek. It was a beautiful stream. It came from Hubbard Lake near Silver Creek. Everyone came to the service, where a dozen young people were to be baptized. I remember the time and also the young people so well, so will name them. There were the Bryants, Fergesons, Stirwalts, Mrs. Chubb, Mattie Griggs, Brother John and I who joined Church. The weather turned cold, so Rev. Blowers decided to wait until the water in the creek was warmer, and he would baptize us later. By the time we were to be baptized, some of the members did not feel the importance of the step they had taken. Becky Stirwalt was one who told the girls she had a nice Alpaca dress. The goods had been purchased in Minneapolis. Becky told us being baptized did not mean enough to her to get this new dress spoiled. We explained that Christ sacrificed more than a dress, but she was very positive. Most of the girls in our group were horrified at her remarks.

On the date set for the big service, I had a severe cold, so was not allowed to go to the creek to be baptized. Becky, however, had a change of heart; she joined the group and became a sincere Baptist. Two weeks later, a girl friend (who waited for me) and I were baptized by 84 emersion by Rev. Blowers. We wore Calico dresses. Nails were sewed securely in the hems of our dresses so our skirts would not float while we stood in the

Library of Congress

water. On a young spirited horse, I rode to the church. I was filled with importance of the occasion, knowing Christ himself bowed to this ordinance. The sixteenth verse in the third chapter of Matthew came to my mind many times on my way to the church. "And Jesus when he was baptized went straight way out of the water and Lo the Heavens were opened unto Him, and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him, and Lo a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased".

I shall never forget the impression the Holy rite made upon my young soul, I resolved to live and work for my Lord whenever I was called to work for Him. I wonder if the young people of this day feel so completely the seriousness in becoming a church member. When the preacher was about to emerge me, Nicholas's faithful dog dashed from behind a tree. He seemed to be under the impression I was drowning and wanted to rescue me. This was an unlooked for incident. Brother John caught him and tied him to a tree some distance away. He yelped and howled until he saw I was safely out of the water.

85

Chapter VI UPS AND DOWNS IN FARMING

My dear Children,

Life had very few changes. We rose early in the morning, helped with the milking, cared for the chickens, assisted Mother with the house work and garden, and picked berries. Father seemed to need my help since brother John had been ill, During a very hot summer day, he had been working in the hay field where he became very ill. The doctor was called and informed us he had a sunstroke. Father was away a good share of the time drawing plans for buildings and contracting jobs in Buffalo and in our community. Brother Dick still worked for Mr. King near Minneapolis, so father expected me to do a great deal of work on the place.

Library of Congress

John Vandergon came to visit us real often. He took his soiled shirts along, and Mary and Mother gladly washed and ironed them for him. Nicholas took his shirts to Dick's wife who graciously did them up for him. Many times, Mary and John took long walks. In time, he asked for the consent of Mary's folks to marry her. This consent was not given until John had a place of his own. He wrote his parents who advised him Mr. Braat was right. He should not expect his bride to live in the little log house with the bachelors.

In due time, he heard of a farm which was for sale. There was no house on it, but a quarter of a mile from the farm was the vacant house of James Price. It was the home where we landed when we came from Holland. The Price family moved to Minneapolis. John decided to sell his interest in the Vandergon farm to Hugh and Nicholas, buy this houseless farm and live in the Price home 86 while father built a house and barn for him.

After the land was purchased, plans were made for the wedding. The date of the wedding was set for June 10, 1876. It was the date of John's birthday. He was thirty years of age and his bride ten years his Junior.

While John was busy hauling logs to the saw mill to have it cut into lumber, Mary made plans for her new home. Mary eagerly listened to Mother as she told of her own elaborate wedding and knew her daughter's would have to be very simple. Mary was very practical and told Mother her wedding could be as elegant as any she had attended in Minnesota. It was quite an event when Mother and Mary went to Monticello to buy the dress material for her wedding dress and other articles Mary wanted. The dress material was called De Lave. They bought the usual amount of twelve yards. It was a light blue. When they cut the dress, they discovered the material was very narrow. To their distress they found that if Mary wanted the usual amount of ruffles, they would have to have more material. The men were very busy doing spring field work, so could not give up a team to take them to Monticello. When she finally had an opportunity to go to the store, the dress goods she wanted was sold. Mary was heart broken for she wanted the skirt three or four yards wide and the right amount of ruffles on the skirt. One day, a neighbor lady came over and

Library of Congress

together they planned how to cut it, but the quantity of goods allowed only one ruffle on the skirt and one on each sleeve. For Mary, her wedding was ruined. The neighbor lady who was supposed to be a good seamstress suggested she take the dress material home and make it for Mary. Mother wanted to make a new dress for herself and also for me so appreciated the offer.

87

We seriously talked of going to town to buy other material, but father thought it was extravagance and all for a few ruffles. He said the farm did not support the family and pay for the improvements he had to put in the place, and he as an architect and contractor received only one dollar and fifty cents a day, Ordinary labor received fifty to seventy-five cents a day. Mother wanted some painting done that spring and get Mary the many needed articles to start housekeeping. So father decided there would be no other wedding dress. Ruffles were silly, and why not leave them off entirely?

Mother got her paint and soon, our rooms were freshly painted. The dress was to be ready the day before the wedding. When Mary came for the dress, it was not quite ready. The seamstress said if he would wait, it would be finished in the afternoon. When Mary tried it on, they found it was too small? No matter how they pulled or let out seams, it would not close. Mary cried bitter tears, as the woman suggested they use the one ruffle on the skirt to make up the gap. "What! Not even one ruffle on the skirt of my wedding dress," wailed Mary. Ruffles are cut on the bias so we can't do that. Mary removed the dress and took it home, hoping that Mother could solve the problem. It was almost dark, and in her haste, she fell over a stump in the middle of the road and lost the spool of blue thread. She did not miss the thread until she reached home. That night, Mother and Mary stayed up most of the night trying to enlarge the dress.

Four o'clock in the morning on June 10 found us hurrying with the chores and setting the house in order. I had picked many wild flowers the day before for bouquets. There were so

Library of Congress

many blood roots. I thought they were dainty and tried to arrange them so they made an attractive bouquet.

88

Mrs. Locke stopped in early that morning and told me Blood Root flowers predict bad luck. In spite of Mrs. Locke's superstitions, we used the flowers for decorations.

In all our rush, we overlooked getting some things for the wedding dinner, so father decided he could drive to Clear Water to get the articles we needed and also take a few sacks of wheat to be ground into flour at the mill, one sack for our family and one sack for John and Mary. The wedding was to be at High noon. The dinner was to be served at one thirty or two. Father was certain he could be back in time to dress for the wedding.

A few days before the wedding, Nelson Locke who was our Justice of the Peace told father he would like very much to tie the knot. On the wedding day at ten o'clock we saw Nelson Locke drive on the yard, unshaven and garbed in a turkey red flannel shirt, and his gray trousers were badly soiled. We told him over and over again Mary was to marry at High noon, and Rev. Blowers was coming from Monticello to unite the couple. Mother was busy in the kitchen getting things ready for the dinner. She reminded my sister and me there was no time to spare. There was so much work to be done before the guests arrived. The bride groom was dressing upstairs, but hearing a strange voice came down in his wedding clothes. Mr. Locke explained to John that Rev. Blowers had had a little accident on his way near the Swedish Settlement. Mrs. Blowers was slightly hurt, so they had gone back to Monticello. He told John he was in a great hurry, for he had to make a trip to Monticello in the afternoon. He wanted Mary to hurry up, When I came upstairs, I found Mary in tears. "My dress doesn't come together", she said.

We both looked horrified and at once went 89 into the closet to find another dress. I picked out the dress I liked to see her wear and said, "Mary, won't you please wear this pretty dress? It has the right amount of ruffles and looks so well on you". It was a very delicate

Library of Congress

red dress, dotted with little white stars, a tiny black edge around each star. She wore her new black shoes, a dainty broach, and carried a pretty hankie. While we were dressing, John called us several times and said, "Nelson Locke is in a hurry. He can't wait any longer". When we came down he said to Mary, "Will you take this man John Vandergon for your legal husband?" "Why, yes" said Mary. He asked John if he would take Mary for his wife. They thought he was joking for they didn't stand together and knew Rev. Blowers was coming at the appointed time. "Alright, sign here and pay me the two dollars when you get it. Good luck and good bye", he said. He rushed out of the door.

We looked at each other and were stunned. Father was just coming up the drive way as Nelson Locke was leaving. Mary and John thought he was joking or going through the ceremony so when the family and guests were assembled, they would know what questions would be asked. Father dressed in a hurry and set two chairs for the bridal couple where they had planned to be married. Then father asked if Rev. Blowers had arrived. We related the story and when he looked at the papers, he knew the knot had been tied. Father was furious. Mother was crying. The guests soon began to arrive, and my bewildered Father and Mother did not know how to explain the situation. The good neighbors seemed to understand Nelson Locke's crude way of doing things, so the couple took their place intended for the ceremony. Father offered prayer and everyone congratulated them. Then we went on with the regular wedding plans. my younger girl friends assisting with the serving. It may have been a strange way to marry 90 a couple, but they were happily married for fifty-two years, when John was eighty-three years of age left his wife in the care of his two sons and five daughters.

I dreaded Mary's leaving more than I could ever tell. We had been so devoted to each other. She wasn't going so far away, but it seemed my pal was gone. It was fun helping her clean and arrange her new things in the Price home. Somehow, I loved the place that befriended us that cold June when we had no place to go. The flowers and morning glory vines were welcoming Mary as she moved in.

Library of Congress

Time in its relentless rush went on. I had very little spare time that summer. Mother missed Mary with the house work, so I tried to take Mary's place. Brother John could not be in the hot sun, so Father expected me to help him also.

We had no phones. Any little communication had to be proceeded by a long walk or if a horse was available, we rode horse back. So Brother Dick bought me a beautiful saddle horse. Most girls had a saddle horse of their own. How I loved my new horse! It seemed as if all distances were shortened.

My brother Dick was now a mail carrier of the district from the town of Monticello to Fair Haven, later on from Fair Haven to Minneapolis. He had a light wagon, so brought freight and supplies for the neighbors and merchandise for the store keepers in Monticello.

John and Mary were very busy building their new home. They had an abundance of beautiful trees and a saw mill close by, so any amount of hard lumber was piled on their yard. Neighbors 91 were always ready to help in their spare time. However, by fall their house and barn were not completed. John and Mary were invited to live with a neighbor, Mrs. Fee, who lost her foster mother, Mrs. Rowell. She was very lonely and urged them to spend the winter with her. It was a half mile closer to their farm where John worked during nice weather. They also were closer to our home. Mrs. Fee was very friendly. Her husband worked for the railroad company building new roads going from one place to another. She could not go with him since her foster mother had been so ill. Mrs. Rowell had raised Mrs. Fee when her own mother passed away. Mrs. Rowell had only one son. He was married, rented the house to his step sister and the land to neighbors. Mary and John thought they could rent the farm. It bordered the forty acres they bought. It was cleared by people who lived on it before Mr. Rowell purchased it. The Indians chased them away, so the neighbors told us.

Mrs. Fee had a good house. She had made carpet for the entire room from strips of old clothes. She knitted the carpet, then sewed long strips together until she had the desired

Library of Congress

length. It made a good floor covering with straw under the carpet. She had three bedrooms upstairs and a large living room and kitchen downstairs.

It was a very rainy autumn. One afternoon, it looked unusually dark, so we decided to get the cows real early. We always had a cow bell on one dependable cow, so we could locate them any moment. Mother and I soon found the cows, but they were on the other side of the creek. A boat was anchored which had been fastened with a chain to a stake. I decided the cows could easily wade through the creek if they were induced from the other side. Mother and I jumped into the boat after loosening it from its mooring. I rowed the 92 boat to the other side but found there was no earthly place to fasten the boat. By that time, it was raining very hard. The cows and calves waded and swam through the creek. I had put the car of the boat in the ground with all the force I had. Then when we were ready to go home, I could not pull the oar out of the ground, and the boat was headed for the center of the creek. So I took the boat and pulled it to shore, wading in the water up to my shoulders. As we came to shore, a bolt of lightning hit a tree near by, which frightened us dreadfully. We arrived home dripping wet. The cows were home before we were.

That fall, the second of September to be exact, we started to pick the cranberries. They were across the field on the other side of the fence, down a steep hill. We called it our Cranberry Marsh. In that day, fields were fenced in and cattle ran at large in unclaimed forests and marshes, as most of the land still had to be cleared. The soil had to be broken up, stumps dug out and burned, stones removed, and then the grain could be planted. I remember the first time I came upon this marsh of red cranberries. I tasted one. "Sour", I exclaimed and took a handful home. Our friends told us to pick them and sell them for four or five dollars a bushel, according to size. I went to the marsh as early as possible each day, taking my lunch with me. I took two one hundred pound sacks and sorted them after they were picked. Many times, I received five dollars a bushel. One time, I had a bushel and a half of the large berries. The marsh was a beautiful place, surrounded by hills filled with all sorts of trees, flowers, and ferns.

Library of Congress

You may remember the old fashioned sun bonnets we used to wear. My neck used to get so very warm under the curtain-like ruffle which 93 was starched stiff. Mother also made very dainty sun bonnets to match our dresses. We wore them to church and social gatherings. later on when we had silk dresses, the bonnets were made of the silk to match our dresses. Sometimes, we tied the bonnet and hung it over our arm. If we had short sleeved dresses, we wore mitts that came to the elbow. It was a dreadful disgrace for a girl to get tanned or sunburned.

One day when I was picking berries in the marsh, a bullet sailed over my head. I screamed with fright and as I jumped up, I saw a well dressed young man running towards me looking dreadfully pale and frightened. He stammered, "Are you hurt?" I assured him I was not hurt. He informed me his name was Chris Upton, and he lived in St. Paul. He had been ill and had come to live with his aunt and uncle Mr. and Mrs. Chelson. They were moving into the Price home. Two days later, a heavy frost came and several bushels of precious cranberries hung pale and flabby on the black frozen vines.

As early winter came, we had more time for reading and studying. Father and Mother both had had an education. They worried about our lack of education. There was a school for young ladies in St. Cloud, which was twenty-six miles from our home. This school was established in 1869, and sometimes as many as a hundred and sixty students were enrolled there. Somehow, it seemed impossible for us to leave home. Mother needed our help. So instead, each winter found us spending our spare time studying the lessons assigned by our parents. They made us memorize much poetry. Spelling too was very important as well as geography and history, first of our state and then the other states and our country in general. Later on, we took different subjects. Brother Dick brought many books from Minneapolis.

94

Father lost no time in assigning the lessons to us. Poor prices for farm products and the unimproved roads made it impossible for us to take music lessons. We were so fortunate

Library of Congress

to have the organ and during the winter months father gave us music lessons and saw to it that we put in our time of practising.

During the winter evenings, Prayer meetings were held once a week, when weather permitted. We usually took our sled. Father put extra side boards on it and straw in the bottom of the wagon box. We also had a Buffalo robe, so we were very comfortable. It was the custom of the people to inquire of each other after the service if they had been blest, meaning had they received spiritual help.

On our way home one evening, the horses stopped, they must have known something was wrong. The driver did not see the stump on the side of the road, and our sled went over. The boys quickly got out. The two stakes on the left side which held the wagon box was broken off and so it tipped over to that side. The wagon box came down on our out stretched arms and hands. The horses and the running gear left us, and we were in the snow, the wagon box covering us. The horses ran home, the boys following them. We usually took a lantern along whenever we went out, but had forgotten to do so this particular time. Flash lights were unheard of in those days. The men went home and made two pegs to hold the wagon box in place. In a short time, the wagon box was in place and we were homeward bound.

The year 1877 brings to my mind a very vivid picture. Father had an opportunity to rent the farm to Mr. Dan Stirwalt for the following year. Mr. Stirwalt had several boys who could help him farm the land. We could retain the 95 house. Father was busy building and felt he could make more money in this line of work. He knew John was not able to be in the hot sun, and Henry was too young to be of much help. Our crop looked beautiful that summer, even though it was a dry year. We had harvested the barley.

One day, we heard a roaring noise like the rumbling of a train. It was three o'clock in the afternoon, it was a beautiful cloudless sky; but in a short time the sun was darkened, and soon it was completely covered by large grass hoppers. They came down upon us and

Library of Congress

ate everything, even the onions. Our wheat, just in the milk stage, was quickly devoured, and the green corn and grass were completely gone. They came in the house and got into the flour barrel. It seemed that nothing stopped or tempered their ferocity to devour. After stripping the grain fields and vegetable gardens Of everything green, they attacked the homes of the farmers and practically drove them out of the country. Many people left their farms, for they were powerless. It was a plague sent from God to teach us something. The prices of farm lands went down fifty percent and there were no purchasers. Mr. Stirwalt decided it was no use to rent our farm.

For three years, we farmed only to see the hoppers eat our crop, with no feed for the cattle, hens, pigs and horses, and no wheat for flour. The men put elastic bands around their ankles and trousers to keep the pests from walking up their limbs, for they would bite a person. They ate holes in our clothes on the clothes line. Someone had to watch near the line and brush them off the clothing. Sometimes, we hung our clothes in the cellar or upstairs. We wore petticoats with several ruffles stiffly starched. They especially liked the starch. It was beautiful fall weather. I walked to the cranberry marsh which the hoppers 96 had overlooked. Perhaps the berries were too sour. That fall, I picked ten bushels of cranberries. We did not have food for our hens, so father sold most of them, and we ate all but a few, which we kept for we needed the eggs. Mother told us again and again not to complain for every one was having the same trouble. but we earnestly prosed God to deliver us from this plague.

We hoped each year the hoppers would leave us after a hard frost, but we found they dug or bored holes in the ground some five to eight inches deep. When we opened up these holes, we found they were filled with tiny eggs which like tulip bulbs could withstand the frost. The eggs seemed glued together and were placed in neat rows in what seemed containers one and a half to three inches in length. The hoppers choose new breaking or hard ground. The ground in spring looked as if rice had been sown thickly. As the wheat began to grow in spring, the hoppers began to hatch. They loved barley but didn't bother potatoes very much. The farmers with older farms were not molested like we who had

Library of Congress

broken the land recently, so the farmers who were fortunate to have a crop helped the farmer who had no crop in the way of flour and vegetables.

The young Vandergons were not submissive and pondered what to do with the pests. As they plowed their land the first fall and found millions or billions of the grasshopper containers, they struck on a plan. They would dig a long ditch or trench, throw a light sprinkle of straw over the field and when the wind was in the right direction set fire to the straw. In that way, they would drive them out towards the ditch. So the trench was dug. It soon proved to be that the wingless beasts could not climb up to the level of the ground. They went to a certain height and then quickly dropped down. In a short time, they began to show life and action so when the wind was right, a match was put to the straw which was spread over the ground. It worked. All these millions on the ground on their way to the trench were consumed. When the wind was in another direction, they took water and old sacks with them so they could keep the fire under control. The neighbors, seeing how well it worked, did likewise. In no time, the news spread around the farmers in our neighborhood and state. Some grasshoppers remained the following years, but no special harm was done. We had an abundance of rain the following years. Grasshoppers don't like wet weather, so they slowly disappeared.

Chinch bugs came in 1879 and stayed a year, In a few days, the fields looked as if they had been scorched by fire. They ate the corn.

During the grasshopper plague, people could not afford to build new homes. So many of the Yankees gave up in despair, but the immigrants stayed, sowed grass, and bought more cows so they could have butter and cheese.

Father decided to work in Minneapolis, which was being built up by outside money to a great extent. While father worked there, we rented the farm but retained the house. Father had had to sell most of our animals including my riding horse due to lack of food. We could not let the animals starve and could not buy food. This was a heart breaking experience.

At the time of the grass hopper plague, word came from Holland that grandfather Das had passed away at the age of eighty-seven years. Poor Mother had always hoped to see him again. His father, my great grandfather, lived to be ninety, so Mother hoped he might reach that age. He was so strong and well when we left in 1867. It 98 seemed as if one hardship after another came our way. Besides the sickness and loss of dear ones and financial worries, she had to carry on and always hoped for better times.

The following year, father had a piece of land he wanted to clear, so with the help of neighbors, he had the trees cut and sawed on shares. Mr. Chubb, the owner of the saw mill, sold the lumber by the foot for cash, so father realized something from that. The men he hired were experienced wood choppers. Some of the logs were left on a pile to dry. Father had considerable land cleared by this time. Some of the logs were hauled home and when time permitted, father cut them up for fire wood. We thought it was a terrible thing to burn this lovely Maple and Oak wood in our stoves. But every one had too many trees. They were anxious to clear the land and break the soil. They called this unbroken soil Virgin soil.

During the hopper and chinch bug years, many farmers left our community, but father still firmly believed that Minnesota had a future if we all worked to make it a better place in which to live. Father cleared more land each year in order to raise larger crops. Wheat sold for forty cents a bushel. Our garden gave us an abundance of vegetables. We raised a number of chickens again. Eggs sold for ten cents a dozen. Even though we were deprived of the comforts of life we had wholesome food. We all enjoyed good health, and that was worth more than money.

99

Chapter VII OUR ROMANCE AND NEW HOME

My dear Children,

Library of Congress

The next thing of great importance happened on a cold morning in February. To be exact, it was the 28th of February in 1878. Mother and father were called to the home of Mary and John the evening before. When they returned the following day, they informed us that a little daughter was born to the young couple, so we all gained a new title. How we loved this sweet blue eyed daughter. In 1902, she took up nursing in North Western hospital in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She served in World War I along with her sister Johanna who also was a nurse and served in France during the First World War. She had taken up nurses training in 1909 in St. Claire Co. Hospital, Santa Cruz, California.

At this time I would like to give you the names and dates of the births of Mary's children: Marie Blanch, born February 28, 1875, and was married to Ralph Dalman; Peter Leonard, born September, 1879, residing in California; Johanna Amelia, born August 31, 1880, residing in California; Nelly Flora, born October 21, 1883, married to Simon Gruys; Henry Arthur, born January 26, 1886, was drowned while swimming in Coyote Creek, California, June 11, 1907; Gertrude Amy, born January 29, 1889, married to H.H. Bearce, Menlo Park, California; Lucy Mae, born November 27, 1891, teacher in Menlo Park, California; John James Edward, born June 4, 1889, Lt. in World War II.

Since father sold my horse, I was not free to go to my girl friends or to the store as I used to do. However, someone called for me whenever there were social gatherings in the 100 neighborhood. It was young Frank Harrison who always seemed very willing to call for me. He was handsome, was a good singer, and had a fluent vocabulary that fascinated me. We became very good friends. He talked of marriage too, and he wrote me interesting letters. Buggies seemed only for ministers, doctors, and well-to-do folks. However, the young man's mother owned a buggy and team of spry horses. They were not over worked like our horses. He lived on the Monticello Prairie. One day a letter came from him inviting me to visit his home the following Sunday. I asked my parents for permission and obtained their consent to go; so I answered his letter in the affirmative.

Library of Congress

It was a beautiful Sunday in September. They had a very attractive place. Better still was the warm welcome awaiting me. They greeted me as if I was one of the family already. Frank resembled his mother very much in looks. They were cut after the same pattern. His sister seemed very delicate and frail. There was no resemblance between sister and brother. After the dinner dishes were done up, the daughter retired to her bedroom for a rest. Then as was often done in those days, the family album was produced and I in a way was introduced to the family. Mrs. Harrison's husband had died several years ago, also her two daughters. In their pictures, I could see they all looked rather delicate. They had all had the dread disease consumption. She told me there was no consumption in her family and Frank was definitely her child. She knew he would never get the disease. What a tale of woe! I knew then the young daughter was afflicted also. I was quiet on the way home that evening. My thoughts were on the information I had obtained. When Frank left me that evening, I frankly told him I had enjoyed the day, also his company for the time we had been going steady, but we could not see 101 each other again. But the following Sunday, Frank came again and told me he had been to Minneapolis and had a physical check up. This doctor pronounced him free from any T.B. germs and said if he was robust like his mother's people, he might live to be an old man. For awhile I was happy, but my folks told me again and again that if I did not want to bring sadness and sorrow to myself and children, I should never marry this young man. My folks were right, but it seemed so cruel. I had always before me the picture of a perfect manhood, his love for the better things in life, and I felt that we had so much in common. The following year, Frank had pneumonia, could not get over the cough, and was finally stricken with the disease. His sister passed away six months after my visit in their home.

Several months later on a Sunday morning as I was dressing for church, there was a knock at the door. When I opened it, I saw to my surprise young Nicholas Vandergon dressed in a dark gray suit, white shirt, and gray hat. I had not talked to him for several months since I went to church with Frank. Nicholas went to church with us and spent the day in our home. He had a new lumber wagon and was very proud of it. He continued to

Library of Congress

come every Sunday. Later on, he came on Wednesday evening also. We enjoyed this young man. He was alert, witty, and did a great deal of reading, which pleased our entire family. In a short time, I found myself looking forward to his visits. It seemed a long time from Sunday to Wednesday, and Wednesday to Sunday.

Father was gone part of the time, whenever he could leave the farm. He drew plans for homes, buildings, and was a busy contractor. He was also town clerk of Silver Creek township. Whenever he was away, I had to record the births and deaths, 102 write up mortgages and sign and seal them. This made me feel very important.

The following spring, Nicholas and I took many long walks. He entertained me by telling of their bachelor life and horrible cooking. The break was either half baked or over baked; never just right as it was at our house. In the course of time, we talked of getting married, but him brother Hugh was four years older and was engaged to a girl in St. Cloud. Since Hugh was older than Nicholas, he felt he had the right to be married first and build a new home for his bride. He wanted to build the house a mile south of their log cabin. So Nicholas and I decided to wait two more years. But there's many a slip between the cup and the lip. Hugh's house was nearing its completion when one day he visited his fiancée to talk over plans. When he returned home, he was very quiet and intimated that we get married first and have the house. He and Maggie Knibbee had broken up their engagement.

The summer weather was favorable; the cranberries were unusually good that fall. They brought in more cash than any other year, Willow trees started to grow in the marsh but father cut them down. Little did I think that would be the last fall I would pick cranberries from the marsh. A few weeks later, Nicholas told me his brother Hugh insisted we get married for the house was practically finished. Hugh thought he could board and room with us and work his part of the farm. Hugh and Nicholas had divided the farm with Dick. There was a good sized living room and bedroom downstairs and two bedrooms upstairs. The following spring, we would have the logs sawed into lumber and build a good sized

Library of Congress

kitchen. I saw Nicholas's point of view but hated to break the news to Mother. Mary was married in 1876. Brother Dick was married to Flora Elizabeth Pullen, a school teacher in Fair Haven, on September 10³ 22, 1878, and this was 1880. It seemed we were all leaving Mother so early in life. After a time, I talked the situation over with my parents. Mother listened as the tears trickled down her cheeks. She was twenty when she left her mother. Her mother was twenty when she married grandfather Das. She said it must be a family weakness. I was the proud owner of a sewing machine, thanks to the cranberries. The next weeks found us busy sewing house dresses, aprons, towels, and the many things a bride needs for her new home.

In a few weeks, Nicholas received a letter from his parents stating they had a chance to sell the drug store, and also the family home. They were all so anxious to come to America to see the boys and meet the daughters-in-law. Nicholas had been in America six years and there already had been many changes since he came to Wright Co. The log houses were being replaced with frame buildings. Nicholas's father intimated they would remain in Minnesota the rest of their lives. Marie and Nelly would accompany them and were already making plans and getting extra clothes. They would build a home the following year. What was I to say? We just had to go ahead and fit into their plans. I urged Nicholas to write them again, explaining what they could expect. They had a fine home, two maids to do the work, and no severe winters to face. He had written them about it once and that was enough, besides he was anxious to see his family and said if they didn't like Minnesota, they could move to a warmer climate and they could still see each other occasionally. We planned, then over threw our plans, but we finally set our date for November 4, 1880. It was a beautiful October. Mother gave me all the cranberry money to buy things for my new home. My brother Dick, his wife and baby, Howard, who was born August 21, 1879, came to visit us several times and brought little gifts for my Hope Box. They lived in Minneapolis and 104 was doing very well in the real estate and rental business. Since Minneapolis and St. Paul were growing in leaps and bounds, he looked forward to a bright future. Frank

Library of Congress

Myst was also living in Minneapolis working for one of the newspapers and doing very well.

After Mary's horrible experience with Nelson Locke, I told Mother I never would have him unite us in marriage. I wanted a dignified marriage service with a prayer and blessing to make our marriage sacred. Nicholas said he would speak to Rev. Blowers in time, but Rev. Blowers would be out of town on that date. Then Nicholas went to Clear Water, but no one there could rightfully perform the ceremony. So Nelson Locke, the Justice of the Peace, was the only one to tie the knot. Father and Nicholas had obtained the license in Monticello, the county seat at that time, I told Nicholas to suggest to Nelson Locke that this wedding was to be a dress-up affair. However, the day of our wedding, he came shortly before High noon with the same manner of dress, although he was shaved. However, my parents and the guests were present. Father offered prayer and we had a very nice program planned. Brother John wrote a very humorous poem about our life in Minnesota and our romance, while brother Dick made a serious speech about "People Living Happy Forever After". While he was giving the speech, his little son Howard rushed to his father, pulled on his trousers, and said "See Papa Dick's nice new panties". I forget to tell you my dress fit and it had the correct amount of ruffles. Mother thought it best to buy extra material so we would not have to go through the same agony that Mary experienced. If there was material left, we could use it for a blouse.

The evening of our wedding day, it started to snow so the guests left early. We stayed with the folks for a day so I could help Mother 105 get the house in order and pack our wedding gifts and my belongings.

In a short time, Nicholas and I acquired quite a family, Hugh boarded with us. A Mr. DeVries, Hayerbolt, and William Cool, classmates of Nicholas', arrived from Holland and landed at our house, Nicholas was very busy trying to clear more land to obtain lumber for our new kitchen. These men paid me two dollars a week for board, but worked it out in cutting down trees, so we paid them besides I had to wash and iron for them.

Library of Congress

When spring came, our lumber was ready for the building of our kitchen, pantry, and bedroom off the kitchen. Father drew the plans. The foundation was laid of stones Nicholas gathered from the fields as he cleared the land. We were very busy that spring with the building and planting of the crop. Nicholas's family intended to come in the summer.

One day, a man drove on the yard. He informed me he was an engineer for the Soo Railroad. They were planning to lay the tracks through our farm. How excited I was, but soon remembered that very thing happened to father when I was thirteen. Surveyors came and surveyed father's land for the new railroad which was to run through our farm, but it came to naught. The railroad found a less expensive road bed and a shorter way through Northern Silver Creek. They bought the right to go through Mr. Hastys' land and named the station for him. Father was very unhappy about it for this Mr. Hasty owed him thirty dollars which we never could collect. That was a lot of money in those days, especially after the grass hoppers visited us.

After I thought of our experience, I calmed down. The surveyors said the depot would be built 106 close to where our barn now stands. The tracks would be laid in front of our house. The work men arrived late one evening and brought tents and cots with them. The men were talking loudly and using rough language. I said to Nicholas, "If that is the way it is going to be, I don't want the town of Maple Lake so close to our home". The following morning the foreman came to apologize and said one of the men had been drinking. He wanted to know if I would board the men, and they would pay me well. I decided to try it. Only two of the men slept in our house. The foreman brought groceries and smoked hams. I remember so well how they loved the cottage cheese I prepared. Sometimes, I added chipped green onion tops to it.

There were a dozen men for three weeks. I charged them twenty-five cents a meal. The foreman laughed and paid me forty cents a meal. He told me the railroad had more money then we did. I did not argue with the foreman but was overjoyed at having such a large

Library of Congress

sum of money. We needed several things before the folks arrived, so Nicholas went to Monticello and bought a carpet for the living room six new chairs, and a beautiful black walnut bedroom suite. How very happy we were with our new things. First we put down a layer of paper, then covered the paper with clean straw, and over this we laid the carpet.

The town did not come to be built on our farm. Seven years later, the town of Maple Lake was built four miles south of our farm. We had grown to love our place and later on were so happy the railroad did not run through our land.

We were most happy when Nicholas had only four miles to go for our supplies. Some of the early settlers around Maple Lake were E. B. McCord, 107 Dr. Sargent, Joseph Richliff, Mr. Hamilton, Katilineks and Meyer and their families. Some came as early as 1851 to take claims. The Flahertys, Weltons, and Gordons settled south west near Lake Ramsey. Mail came to the McCord home as early as 1855, so he acquired the title of post master. Mail was brought to his home from Monticello to Forest City which supplied the people in the settlement now called Maple Lake. Later Joseph Richliff took care of the mail for a time. Then William McCrary and G. Gardiner. The flour mill was built by Frank Noble.

The first school was held in the home of Joseph Richliff in 1861–1862. E.B. McCord taught the children. Joseph Richliff helped organize Maple Lake. He had taken a claim and liked to promote worth while projects.

Minnesota was admitted to the union May 11, 1858. I thought you might be interested to know Just a bit of the history of Maple Lake and its first settlers.

I had promised Mother I would help her with spring house cleaning and sewing, but it seemed as if it was I who needed help. Our house was well under way, but it kept me very busy cooking for the extra help. Three times that spring, I walked the three miles to see my Mother. The horses were doing heavy spring work in the field so needed the rest on Sunday.

Library of Congress

One day, we received word that my inlaws would arrive at a certain time if all connections were made. Nicholas borrowed another spring seat and went to Big Lake to meet them. I looked out of our north windows many times, and finally saw them stop at Dick's home, a short distance from our house. After seeing their son Dick and family, they came on to our place. Dick, of course accompanied them. They were overjoyed to see their 108 sons and families. John and family also came that afternoon. It was twenty minutes to twelve when they drove on the yard. I had the table set and dinner ready for the weary travelers. Father and Mother Vandergon used our bedroom off the living room. The girls slept upstairs. Nicholas and I occupied the new bedroom off the kitchen. After they cleaned up a bit and changed their clothing, we had our dinner. Father Vandergon gave a tribute of thanks to our Heavenly Father for their safe arrival and protection of the entire family and being privileged to be together as a family.

They praised my cooking. The bread was light and golden brown. The blackberry pie was delicious, and I had made a nice white cake for dessert. I was just a young bride but had learned how to cook, for which I was thankful. That evening as I was preparing the evening meal, father Vandergon came to me and said, "Gertrude, we are making so much extra work for you. Get a maid and I will pay her". I laughed as I told him there were no maids. He looked very serious for he knew if they remained in Minnesota, his wife and daughters would need a maid. They brought with them the family coat of arms which interested our American neighbors. There are still three coat of arms in existence among the Vandgeron Braat families.

That was a busy summer for me; eleven people to cook for. I was glad for the kitchen and good pantry with its many shelves which were fifteen inches wide. We had a wonderful garden which helped a great deal. Mother Vandergon and the girls tried to be helpful. Nelly had taken a course in pharmacy and Mary had gone to college, but they had never paid any attention to cooking.

Library of Congress

It was a different life for them. They called it a wilderness. It had changed much since 109 we came for the land had been cleared to a great extent and houses built and log houses torn down. Father Vandergon understood now why Nicholas wanted to return to Holland on the next boat. Their trunks were late in coming, so they wore my house dresses. The washings and ironing were terrific. We had no washing machine, so it had to be done on the wash board. We used the old fashioned sad irons, so we had to keep up a roaring fire during ironing days. There was the old oaken bucket type of a well, Every morning, father Vandergon brought the vegetables from the garden, cleaned them for me outside, and brought in several pails of water for general use. In the evening after the supper dishes were washed, our guests sat outside. It was then I hurriedly stirred up a batch of cookies or cup cakes for the following day.

In March, Hugh and Maggie had patched up their little quarrel and were married; that was in 1881, so a house was being built next door to ours. Now Maggie had the worries of the carpenters. It was a relief when the silent painter came and the hammering ceased.

On the thirty first of July, 1881, a daughter was born to us. We had not expected her for several weeks, but the amount of work I had to do made her decide to come to the rescue. So now I could not cook, wash or iron for eleven people, and I needed a nurse. Mrs. Schermer, our dear friend and neighbor, came to nurse me, did the washing and prepared the meals. Dick and John invited the relatives from Holland to visit in their homes. Three weeks after Jennie was born, our little family was alone for the first time since we were married. We walked outside in the sunshine. Nicholas carried the baby, but how clumsy he was in holding her. I was afraid he'd loose her head; she weighed only four and a half pounds at birth. That same week jennie was born, 110 we also had a new colt, so we named her Alpha.

That same evening our baby cried constantly. We did not know what to do for her, but decided something drastic had happened to her little insides. Nicholas said he would harness up the horses and we would take her to the doctor in Monticello. He knew I was

Library of Congress

not able to ride in a lumber wagon over the rough roads, but we figured we would ask either Dick's wife or sister Mary to take the baby. When we were about ready to leave, Nick's folks returned, looked the baby over and said she had too many clothes on. She removed the wool blanket and other clothing and soon little Jennie was sound asleep.

When my kind nurse left me, she said I was in no condition to do all the work so she sent her daughter Nelly to help me. Nick's mother loved to care for the baby and bathed her each day. That summer Jennie was very ill. The doctor called it summer complaint. Many babies died. Nick walked to Monticello to coax the doctor to come out to see her, but he was too busy. He gave Nick a bottle of Blackberry root extract. I am sure doctors would not advise giving medicine to babies in this day and age.

In the early part of October, 1881, the house next to ours was completed. It was the home father Vandergon had intended for his family. Since Hugh and Maggie were married, they decided it was large enough for all of them. There were two bedrooms and store room upstairs, two bedrooms, living and dining room, and kitchen down-stairs. It is the home we have occupied for many years, although we remodeled it by adding a bay window, front hall, and small front porch.

Early that fall, Mr. Hayerbolt and Coal left for Minneapolis and soon De Vries went too. 111 Cool's father was very well to do. His son had heard so much about America, so on the strength of a landing place, they came to our home, De Vries came because he had trouble with his wife. He later on bought a farm and sold it to Mr. Meitsma who came from Chicago. Mr. Vanden Hoek came to America at this time and bought a farm joining ours. He married a sister of Hugh's wife, Miss Knibbee from St. Cloud.

It was a difficult winter for father Vandergon and his family. Nick's mother did not feel well and they did not like America. But they had sternly told their son he was a spoiled child and had to stay here at least one year, so they had to do likewise.

Library of Congress

Late in February, when early spring was approaching, new life seemed to flow through all creation. But Mother and father Vandergon and their daughters resolved to return to Holland, buy another drug store and home, and start life where they left it a short year before. We were all shocked and startled to hear of their decision but could hardly blame them. They were sixty years of age and missed the comforts of a good home and old friends. The girls had no friends here. They could carry on a conversation reasonably well. However, when a neighbor asked Nelly how she liked Minnesota, she replied, "Not very well. My brother's baby weeps so much of the time". The next few months found us busy helping the family pack and arrange for their long ocean trip. At last the long dreaded day arrived when Nick took them to Big Lake on a beautiful May morning in 1882. We knew we would never see them again, so the parting was especially sad. We had grown to love these relatives dearly. It is no use to dwell on the sad parting. We were happy to hear they landed safely in Vlaardinga. The man to whom he had sold the drug store and house wanted to move to another town, 112 so father purchased both house and drug store and soon the family was settled in their old home. It gave them much pleasure and satisfaction to have seen their children and families. Father Vandergon lived only six years after he returned from America. The twenty-sixth of August, 1888, he passed away. The following year, June 24, 1889, Mother Vandergon went to her reward at the age of sixty-eight. Mary and Nelly have no desire to come to Minnesota. They cannot imagine that things are so different now. The new modern homes and beautiful highways sound like fairy stories to them. Sister Mary never married. Nelly married John De Bruyn, a druggist. They have one daughter. Nelly's husband passed away several years ago.

I want to give you the names of Dick's children: Mary was born May 20, 1876, married to Art Dirkzaager; Herman, was born January 9, 1878; John, January 7, 1883; Nettie, January 5, 1885; Bert, December 1887; Peter, June 23, 1889; Arthur, September 8, 1891; Cora, December 28, 1893; Hattie, May 11, 1896; Hugh, February 28, 1899; Jennie, February 16, 1902. Dick's wife Jennie passed away January 14, 1914. Dick passed away June, 1931.

Library of Congress

Hugh and Maggie had three children. Leonard was born May 4, 1882, and twin daughters were born February 2, 1884. One of the twins died five weeks after birth. The other baby was named Bertha, now married to John Comfferman. Leonard married Anna Cook and lives on his father's farm. He built a house a short distance from the home in which his parents lived. Maggie did not live very many years to enjoy her little family for she passed away in June, 1885. She was the first person to be buried in the cemetery which was organized in 1887. Hugh Vandergon passed away five years later. The children, Leonard and Bertha, were raised by their mother's 113 sister, Mrs. Vanden Hoek. After Hugh's death, Nicholas and I purchased Hugh's house, for it was larger and much more convenient.

Each year, Nicholas cleared a few more acres of land, dug the stones and stumps out of the ground, cut down trees and planted more oats, wheat, barley, and corn. We had a fine apple orchard and many raspberry and current bushes. As our country became more settled, roads improved. Tourists came from all over the States to spend the summer at the lakes. Many beautiful cottages at the lakes are occupied by people who love to fish and swim and love the great outdoors.

Nick's brother John decided to sell his farm in Silver Creek and purchased the farm a quarter of a mile south of our place, and enjoining our farm. The men did exchange work. Mary and I were so happy to live within walking distance of each other. On special days we managed to have family dinners together.

I want to give you an idea what prices were in 1864. Father kept the list so that in later years we could compare prices. It came from an old Diary. Calico, per yard, 40 cents; sheeting, per yard, 62 cents; cotton flannel, per yard, 60 cents; ticking, per yard, 70 cents; sugar, four pounds for \$1.00; tea, per pound, 40 cents; salt, per barrel, \$5.00; raisins, per pound, 40 cents; kerosene, per gallon, \$1.20; clothes pins, per dozen, 20 cents, suspenders were 85 cents a pair, chickens sold for 15 cents each; and wood sold for \$1.00 a cord. This price list interested father a great deal so he found a neighbor who had

Library of Congress

a diary with a price list of articles he purchased as early as 1857. This was only ten years before we came to America. Flour per 100 pound sack was \$4.25; kerosene oil, per gallon, \$1.25; matches, per box, 10 cents; soap, per bar, 30 cents. Dairy butter sold for 15 cents 114 a pound; dressed pork, 5 cents a pound, and eggs at 10 cents a dozen.

115

Chapter VIII EARLY SETTLERS

My dear Children,

Perhaps you would be interested to know who some of the early settlers were in Clearwater and Buffalo since Father helped with the building of many of the homes. Clearwater is in the Northern part of Wright Co. Silver Creek forms its eastern boundary. The soil, Father said, was dark sandy loam with clay sub-soil.

The first early settler was Selah Markem. He built a log cabin in 1854. His claim was in section seven. John Oaks came that same year and took a claim in section eight. Asa White, Thomas Porter were also among one of the very first settlers. In 1855 Dr. J. Wheelock, Simon Stevens, Horce Webster, John Farwell and many others came to the community.

The first white child born was Mary Whiting in 1857.

A.C. Powers conducted a school in 1857–1858. In 1860 the first school building was erected.

Simon Stevens was the first Postmaster the building was erected in 1855. W.W. Webster followed Mr. Stevens. In 1861 J.M. Brown became Postmaster. Later on—H.L. Gordon, J.A. Stanton, J.E. Firté, and Jed Feller.

The first hotel was built in 1855. S.Webster. In 1857 Frank Morrison built a larger hotel.

Library of Congress

The first church services were conducted by Rev. Creighton of Monticello in 1855.

116

A flour mill was built in 1858 near Clearwater River, by Rogers and Mitchell. Later on a larger mill was built by Davis and Beale.

Seth Gibbs and N. Whiting had the first store in 1856. A year later W.T. Rigby opened another store. S.A. Heard and O.S. Lock soon opened stores.

A two story frame school house was built in 1871 on Sec. seven. Later on a school was erected on Sec. twenty-two.

A Methodist church was organized in Jan. 1858. Rev. Levi Gleason was the first preacher. In 1881 a larger and better church building was erected. The congregational church was organized in 1859. O.S. Senter was the first pastor. In 1860 Rev. R. Twitchell was pastor and was instrumental in helping the people build a new church building. Rev. Wm. Crawford became the pastor. Rev. Dodd was called and remained until 1867, when Rev. Stearns took charge, Rev. Nelson Clark, Rev. P.S. Smith.

In Aug. 1858 a Masonic lodge was instituted. Some of the early day settlers of this community were Chas. Barrett and wife, who came from New York, Geo. Benson came from Vermont, A.T. Boyington, H. Campbell, E. Crossman, Ed. Clocker, D.S. Doyon, Jed Fuller, James Hibbard, Wm. Kirk, Sam Kirk, Robert Lyons, James Maxwell, I.E. Merrill, S. Markham, Thomas Porter, Geo. Pratt. H. Ranney, Simon Stevens, Robb Shaw, C. Smith, L. Shaw, Seymore Smith, Philip Schwab, Wm. Vorse, Wm. Webster, Chas. Vorse, J.D. Wheelock, Isaac Whitney, Wm. West.

Buffalo the land was nearly all covered with timber when we arrived in 1867. The soil too, was a rich dark loam. There were many meadows and lakes. Buffalo Lake, from which the 117 town derives its name, lies partly in Buffalo.

Library of Congress

Lake Pulaski is about two miles to the Northeast and Pelican Lake extends into the northeast corner of the town from Monticello. These are the largest lakes. The town was named by Indian traders on account of the large number of Buffalo fish found in that lake. The Indians fished in summer and gathered cranberries, in the winter they hunted deer. The neighbors told us that in 1855 the entire space where the court house now stands was covered with tepees. There also was a trading post.

In 1851 a Mr. Brissette, an Indian trader, living at Lake Calhoon near Minneapolis, with several pioneers cut a road through the timber from Lake Calhoon to Buffalo by way of the west side of Medicine Lake and Lake Sarah, crossing the Crow River at Rockfort.

The first man to locate in this township was Augustus Prime, on Sec. 9, April 1855. Solomon Hatch came the same year. Amasa Ackley and G. Overton arrived in the fall. They took claims on Sec. Thirty. James Griffen took a claim on Sec. Thirty-two. Mr. Griffen was a colored man. In the spring of 1856 Moses Calkins, David Calkins, Daniel Gray, Thomas Smithson and S.B. Culver settled in the community of Buffalo. The first white child was born in the town was Wm. Smithson, son of Tom Smithson, May 1856. The first marriage took place 1857. James Gilbert and Jennie Prime. The first real dwelling was built in 1856.

The town of Buffalo was organized May..., 1858. Also the first school district was organized. Mrs. D. Blakely was the first teacher. In 1862 there was an Indian outbreak and most of the settlers fled to Monticello. Many returned to their homes in six weeks. However, in June 1863 the Dustin family was murdered, which created quite a panic.

Jackson Taylor opened the first hotel. The Windsor Hotel was opened in 1874. The Lewis Sturges Hotel was built in 1867. Chas. Harvey was the next owner. He changed its name to American House.

Library of Congress

Mr. Taylor purchased the saw mill in Rockford in 1859 and moved it to Buffalo. It was not successful. In 1866 Jackson Taylor, Wesley Bailey and C. Harvey built a steam saw mill. It did a big business.

The first church was organized in 1858 of Baptist denomination. The Presbyterian church was organized in 1875 with eight members. A church building was erected in 1876. The first preachers were Rev's. J.W. Dickey, H.P. Falleneider, J.P. McLane. H.C. Cheadle.

The first newspaper published in Buffalo township was in 1879 and was named Truth Teller. A small sheet, edited and printed by Frank Widatrand in his own home. It was issued twice a month. It's life was very brief for in a year and a half it ceased to exist.

In 1879 Nelson Lodge No. 135 A.F. and A.M. was organized with fifteen charter members. Mr. McInturf was worshipful master in 1880. Buffalo Grove No. 13 U.A.O.D. was instituted in June 1876 with eighteen members.

John C. Nugent, a native of Mass. who was born in 1846 was the County Sheriff for many years, being elected in 1873.

Mr. Clarence Oakley was born in May 1846 in New York. In 1873 he came to Buffalo and opened a general store in company with E.J. Cutts.

119

Dr. R.O. Cady came to Buffalo in 1862 and was a patient worker for the people. Dr. S.E. Dean came later.

120

Chapter IX OUR CHILDREN

My dear Children,

Library of Congress

When Jennie was eighteen months of age, a little boy came to join our family circle on March 8, 1883. We named him William Denier. He was a happy healthy child, was always ready with a smile, and as he grew older, was a ray of sunshine. He had a wonderful sense of humor. No matter what happened, there seemed to be a funny side to every situation.

The early years of our married life hurried on and on January 2, 1885, a beautiful blond, blue eyed daughter came to join our family. She was a sweet, quiet child, always so gentle and thoughtful of others. We called her Flora Elizabeth for my brother Dick's wife whom we loved and admired. Her golden curls and large blue eyes made quite a contrast with our other children who had dark hair and eyes. Our daughter Anna Cornelia was born October 19, 1897. We named her for my husband's aunt. She was a healthy child full of energy and pep. She was always large for her age, while Flora was a dainty child. There was very little difference in their size even though there was two years and nine months difference in their ages. I used to dress the little girls alike, and made sun bonnets to match their dresses.

The year Anna Cornelia was born, Maple Lake boasted of a general store owned by Mr. Kavanaugh. Soon Mr. Ertle opened a drug store and Dr. O'Corner hung out his shingle. And then the Post Office was opened. Slowly but surely little store buildings were erected and occupied. Up to this time our mail had come to Monticello twice a week. There were eleven families in our immediate neighborhood, so we planned wisely and 121 took turns in making the trip to get supplies for each other, also taking the mail from Monticello. Then the neighbors called for it, It was a wonderful thing to have the mail come direct to Maple Lake, which was only four and a half miles from our farm. Even though the roads were unimproved, we could easily walk the distance.

In 1888, we had another son. Long before his birth, we named him Robert Ralph. He lived only one day. His death was a great disappointment. The doctor gravely told us he did not think we would have another child. You can imagine our extreme joy when on September

Library of Congress

12, 1891, another daughter was born. We named her Dorothy Thersa. She was a sweet, quiet child, very much like our daughter Flora. She has been a most faithful and loving daughter. We needed her so much the following year when on April 13, 1892, our dear little Flora was taken from us by death. The doctor called her illness inflammation of the bowels, which was later named appendicitis. Operations were unheard of in that day. It was so hard to give her up. It seemed as if we had been called to endure many hardships, but this grief seemed unbearable. When I say I was bewildered with grief, I mean just that. We had a beautiful wreath made of her golden curls.

Five months later, September 9, 1892, my father passed away. He was only ill nine days. This too was a severe loss. Mother felt so lonely. Our father had hoped and planned to accomplish so much in building up the community, we did not feel his work was done. He was only sixty-six years of age. A month after father's death, a son came to comfort us. We named him Cornelius Arnold, He was born October 16, 1892. He has been a joy and comfort to us through the years. He bought the farm when he married 122 Wilhelmina Mol, and for several years lived in the house we built. Later on he built a convenient modern home. They too have had their hardships. Their eldest daughter Joyce died of scarlet fever, October 31, 1926.

Early in November, 1895, my Mother was taken ill. The doctor diagnosed her illness as inflammation of the bowels. She suffered untold agony and on November 13, she was taken from us. How we missed our dear Mother and the sweet letters she wrote us in her spare time, and if she heard of anyone going to Maple Lake, she sent them to us or mailed them. Her letters gave us inspiration and courage to carry on, and she urged us always to have faith that the Lord would help us through all our difficulties. Somehow, the world seemed so different after our parents were gone. We felt so alone, even though we were almost middle age. Twelve days after my Mother's death, our baby was born on Christmas day, December 25, 1895. We named her Florence Ella Grace. She was very frail. It took a good deal of care and much worry to bring her through that first winter. When early spring arrived, we bought a baby carriage. It was up to Cornelia to take her out riding in the

Library of Congress

sunshine. Later Florence was a wonderful helper in the home. She worked in the Security State Bank for several years before she married John Cook, February 22, 1921.

In 1896, Dick's wife, Flora, died, and brother Dick died in May, 1899. His special line was real estate, and was a member of the old firm Condit Dayne & Braat, later Babcock & Braat in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Up to this time we had our church service in the different homes whenever weather permitted, Each family conducted their own Sunday School so the children not only learned their Bible but memorized Bible verse o From time to time we talked 123 seriously of building a small church, but it seemed like a great undertaking for so small a group. There was a Catholic church in Maple Lake, and a Methodist church near Silver Creek, but seldom had a preacher on Sunday to conduct regular service's.

Since the brick school house, District 119, was built in 1892, we had permission to use it for our church services, and Sunday School. We took advantage of this offer and attended church eagerly and gladly. It was difficult for some of the tall stout men and women to crowd into the small seats. My father, A.H. Braat and Tenu Schermer talked and planned for years about organizing a Reformed Church and helping the younger generation start a church building. Father passed away before the plans were completed.

On November 10, 1894, we gathered in the home of Peter Schermer and decided to organize a Reformed church. Then on December 16, 1894, a Rev. Lepeltak and Rev. Dangermond preached for us and assisted us in completing our plans. Fifteen people joined church. Later on, we had a special meeting in the home of John Vandergon where some twenty children were baptized.

In 1895, Rev. Te Paske came from Iowa. He was our student pastor. He preached in the school house and helped with the Sunday School. They elected me Superintendent. Rev. Te Paske was very helpful in organizing this Sunday School. In 1897, Rev. Te Paske was ordained. We extended him a call and he was our pastor until 1899. In 1898, we started

Library of Congress

a fund for our church building. The following summer, Rev. Braak was our student pastor. He was to be ordained the following spring. We liked Peter Braak very much and extended a call to him to become our pastor, but he declined the offer. The following spring, Rev. Steunenberg was our student pastor, then 124 Rev. Van Zante and Rev. Wessilink. These young men served us during the summer months but were Senior students at Hope College in Holland, Michigan.

In 1902, Mr. Vissia and family bought the Vanden Hoek farm. Peter Schermer married Jennie Honing, a niece of Mr. Vanden Hoek. Peter Schermer had bought the John McKenzie farm joining the Vandergon farm. Later on, Cornelius Schermer occupied this farm and Peter moved a short distance north of this place. Gerriet Dalman and family bought the August Swanson farm on the Town Line road, as we called it. Mr. Dalman came from Sandstone, Minnesota. Mr. Vissia and family came from Chicago. In 1903, Lambert Mol and his brother Chris Mol came from Sibley, Iowa moved to our neighborhood. Lambert Mol bought the Charles Bryant farm. Mr. Bryant retired and moved to Monticello. Chris Mol bought a farm a few miles west of our place. Three young Schut men came from Iowa and married daughters of Lambert Mol. Will Schut married Arta Mol. Rev. Schut married Bertha, and John married Jennie. Mr. Cook and family came from Sandstone. Mrs. Cook was a sister of Mrs. Dalman. Mr. Gruys and family came from Iowa. The Doornewerd and Posthumus families came from Chicago. The following years brought the Hoffmans, Nakedbarn, Rozenberg, De. Kraai, Hoekstra, Eigenhuis, Groen, Van Over, and Plaggerman and John Comferman. As time went on, many others bought farms in our community. Some of these people came after our church was built but have been of great help in the church, also in developing this part of Minnesota.

During these days, we were very much excited about our new church building, its location and the building of it. Rev. Kots came from Sandstone to assist with the planning of the church building. Three places were named for a suitable location, so we had to select a site best suited 125 for all the members. One place was suggested as very desirable, in front of and across the road from the T. Schermer home (later owned by Herman Gruys).

Library of Congress

The second place chosen by other members was near the corner where we turned west to go to Annandale. It was not far from the NcKenzie farm, later owned by C. Schermer. The third site suggested was the present location. You can well imagine how we argued and discussed the locations. I hoped and prayed the members would vote for the site nearest to our home. For days, I earnestly prayed the Lord for this location. When I told Nicholas I had promised the Lord that if he would answer my prayer, I would give all my spare time to the up building of this church and work in any capacity, Nicholas looked at me and said, "Don't you think Mrs. Schermer and the women in that neighborhood are praying that the church will be near their home? You can't make a bargain with the Lord". We dreaded the final meeting when we were to vote, How very thankful we were the present location received the majority votes. The land was owned by my husband who had cleared every foot of that ground from trees, stumps and stones, so it was especially dear to us.

In the summer of 1903, Mr. Meinstma, our good neighbor and carpenter, built the church. We had the impressive ceremony of the laying of the corner stone. Every farmer helped haul lumber, bricks, sand and other supplies as needed. They helped generously with the building of it under Mr. Meinstma's supervision. Mr. T. Schermer gave the first donation of three hundred dollars and everyone was willing to donate as much as they possibly could. It was certainly a joyful day when the church building was completed.

The following year 1904, we decided to build the parsonage. It was completed in 1905, and we called Rev. Gruys. We were so happy to have our 126 own pastor. He had a wife and one son; later on twin sons were born to them. Rev. Gruys remained with us until 1909. The church grew steadily; forty families belonged to our church at this time. On Sunday morning, Rev. Gruys preached in the Holland language for the older members of our congregation. In the afternoon, we had the English service and Sunday School.

In 1910, Rev. Dragt was called and served us until October 13, 1913. In June, 1914, Rev. Lammers was called from Corscia, South Dakota. He accepted our call and served us faithfully until June 1, 1921, when he accepted a call to Sodus, New York. Rev. Seigers

Library of Congress

was our next pastor. He was called the summer of 1922 and served us until January 1927. Rev, Harry Van Egmond came to be our pastor in 1927 and left us in 1937. We called Rev. A.A. Dykstra in June 1938, and he came with his young bride. We remodeled the church and manse that summer and made many improvements. Rev. Dykstra and his wife did much to build up the church and Sunday School. They left us for Gary, Indiana in July 1944. Rev. John Vos is our present pastor. He came in December, 1944.

As my children and grand children know, I had the pleasure of working in this church since its beginning. I taught Sunday School for thirty-eight years and also was superintendent of the Sunday School for many years. The ladies aid society gave us an opportunity to get acquainted with the new women of the community and also a spiritual uplift. The early years of our church brought hard work for all of us. For many many years our Sunday School had a Christmas program and tall Christmas tree. We decorated it, lit the candles, had our program, and then distributed the gifts for the children. Rev. and Mrs. Te Paske, Mrs. Vanden Hoek, Peter Schermer, Marie Vandergon and I were the first Sunday School 127 teachers. Each year in December, Mrs. Vanden Hoek and I walked to town to buy Christmas gifts. for the boys and girls. We had thirty-three scholars during the first years. Every year, we dug deep down in our own pockets to help pay for the gifts. We gave such things as knives, handkerchieves pencil sets, and toys, and each child received a bag of candy and nuts. We usually wrapped the gifts at our house. My girls helped to write the names on the packages. We had no fancy Christmas seals or cards, but had no trouble in getting the children to take part on the program. Every child was eager to help.

During the year 1903, our mail route was established. I remember so well the morning I heard a knock at the door. When I opened the door, a man explained that we were to have daily mail delivery. He wanted to stay with us a few days while he established our route and get the names of each member of the families. He also had to procure signers and wanted Nicholas to take him to the different homes to introduce him. We were very happy to help in any way to bring this new convenience to our community.

Library of Congress

It was in March, 1903, this man came to establish the route. About the middle of October of that year, we had our first mail delivery. How excited everyone was. We used to wait weeks for our mail, especially during the winter months when snow drifts blocked the roads to Monticello. Later on, we could get the mail from Maple Lake. Now we had something to look forward to every morning. Henry Gorman was our first mail carrier. He used what we called a road cart the first years, later on he had a buggy and still later, he used a car. He was our friend and a patient one. Always very accommodating. Many times, we called on him to buy certain colors of thread, and then there were times we gave him a sample of a material and he gladly and willingly brought us more dress 128 material. Then many times he brought medicine from the drug store. His brave wife made the route whenever Henry was ill. Many times the roads were impassable, as the roads east of our place were during mid-winter, the mail was left with us. The owners walked to our house to claim their mail.

The year 1903, our son William went to Holland to visit our relatives. It was a very anxious time. Early in May, he left New York. He wrote often and Nicholas walked to town to get the mail several times each week. William returned to the United States in September. We were so anxious to hear about all the relatives and friends he had visited.

In 1905 brought new excitement. This time, we heard that we might have telephone service before long. Nick and I worked hard to get this through. We were always interested in all that pertained to the advancement of our community. Some of the neighbors were very much apposed to having a telephone in the house. They didn't like the constant ringing. Everyone on the line could hear what was said if they removed the receiver. All things that are new progress slowly. The Dutch people are, as a rule, very cautious. They hate to take risks. In due time, the telephones were installed. It was a small matter to call the doctor, talk over business, or order groceries to be put up and ready if we knew of a neighbor who was going to town.

Library of Congress

So 1903 to 1905 were very eventful years. The mail route was established and the telephone was installed. It wasn't long and all the farmers wanted a phone in their home, and it rang merrily along the country line. Two or three women were on the line at the same time exchanging canning receipes and general gossip.

129

Then 1903 gave us a new title, that of grand parents. Our daughter Jennie was married to David Bryant in June 1902. On September 22, 1903, her first son was born.

Much work was being done on the roads and better homes were being built. It was difficult to realize that when we came here in 1867, this country was almost an untouched wilderness. Life was taking rapid strides towards civilization.

In 1906, John and sister Marie decided they wanted to sell their farm and go to a warmer climate, so they sold their farm to Mr. & Mrs. E.L.Break. John and Marie spent several years in California, but returned to Minnesota in 1919 to spend their last years with Edward and family and their daughters, Marie Dalman and Nelly Gruys. Nick's brother John passed away January 8, 1929 at the age of eighty-three years. Mary passed away May 14, 1931 at the age of seventy-seven years. Brother John passed away February 18, 1926 at the age of seventy. Brother Henry died July 7, 1936 of heat prostration. He was sixty-seven years of age. Their lives had been very closely knit with ours, and we missed these dear ones very much.

Four of sister Mary's children remained in California. Their son Peter, daughter Johanna, Gertrude and daughter Lucy. Their son Henry was drowned in California, June 11, 1907.

Our son William lived in Chicago after he returned from Holland, At Easter time, he planned to visit us and when he arrived in Minneapolis, he became seriously ill. He was rushed to the hospital where the doctor pronounced his illness to be Typhoid fever, Later, he developed pneumonia, and he passed away April 22, 1906, Olive Andrews, daughter of

Library of Congress

our neighbor, was his 130 nurse. We laid him to rest beside his sister Flora. I will not dwell on this great loss. Our hearts were broken again, but God gave us strength to carry on.

The year 1906 was also a year of much excitement. The Security State Bank was built, and on January 2, 1907, the bank opened. The very first directors were Josiah O. Jenkins, John A. Elsenpeter, Timothy Leahy, Joseph Baker, Nicholas Vandergon. Officers: Albert Westrup, President; John Welton, Vice-President; Daniel Flaherty, Cashier. Nicholas worked in this bank many years and decided to retire in 1918, but each Saturday found him busy at the bank. He helped during busy days and whenever they needed extra help.

In 1917, the brick school house was torn down and a two room frame school house was built for District #119.

131

EPILOGUE

Since the last letter was written, Mother passed on to her reward on December 11, 1941, at the age of eighty-one years, eight months and eighteen days. Her desire to live never weakened, for she did not feel she had completed her work on this earth. Despite all the loving care and medical aid which was bestowed upon her and despite her strong desire to live so she could finish the story of her life, and celebrate one more Christmas with her children, grand children, and great grand children, she was called home.

It was the family custom to celebrate Christmas Eve with father and Mother. After father was gone, Mother continued to gather her family with her for this celebration. The tall Christmas tree was placed in the bay window of the living room. It was gayly decorated with fancy trimmings and many lights, Mother then placed all the gifts neatly wrapped and tied with bright colored ribbon under the tree. When the family gathered for the celebration, the youngest children were seated on the floor in front of the Christmas tree, the older ones standing in a semi circle around the tree. One of the grand daughters played the organ while everyone joined in the singing of Christmas carols. It was then Mother told

Library of Congress

the Christmas Story in her interesting manner, while everyone listened attentatively. Then Mother presented the gifts. Refreshments were served by her daughters and daughter in law.

During her last illness as I sat at her bed side, she talked again and again of the different happenings she wanted to record in her autobiography. She had planned to tell in detail about each child and grand child, the celebration of their golden wedding anniversary, and their fifty-fifth wedding anniversary. Then too, she intended to write about their life together and about Father's passing. We had hoped Mother would be able to relate these important events in her own words.

On November 4, 1930, we had the great privilege of celebrating Mother and Father's golden wedding anniversary in the home of their son Arnold, who had bought the old homestead when he was married. Mother and Father were so pleased to have all their living children with them on this great occasion. Their children were Jennie Bryant and husband David, who lived a mile east on their farm; Cornelia Workhoven came from Sioux City, Iowa; Dorothy Gruys and husband Herman, who lived on their farm a mile north of the family home; Arnold and his wife Winnie; and Florence Cook who with her infant son came from Chillicothe, Missouri. Most of the grand children were present, and also a few great grand children. Mother's only sister Mary was unable to attend the celebration for she had undergone an operation and was hospitalized in Buffalo. Father's brother Dick, who was eighty-three years of age and not very robust, was able to spend the day with the family. Many relatives and friends came hundreds of miles. Among them was our former pastor and his wife, Rev. and Mrs. Lammers.

So we made a company of sixty-two at the tables, which were placed in the living and dining room. Father had made and written all the place cards. When we were seated at the tables, the pastor asked a blessing, also thanked God for the comfort and guidance our parents had received during the past fifty years, and asked for strength and help for the

Library of Congress

years ahead. Then with grateful hearts, we sang, "Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow".

The delicious dinner followed. It was nearly 133 the same wedding menu they had on their wedding day, November 4, 1880, although fruit cocktail and golden salad were unheard of in the early days. The chicken and lamb had been carefully prepared by Arnold's wife and Dorothy. The cake too, was the same recipe used fifty years ago. It was a little more decorated.

After the dinner, we remained in our places at the table while we had a most interesting program. Jo Vanden Hoek, a friend and neighbor, read a humorous poem about the bride and groom and their early day adventures. Then we called on Father, who in an interesting way described their experiences. He told how the entire farm was a thick forest and each tree had to be cut down, the ground broken and the stumps of the trees removed. Slowly but surely living conditions improved, better roads and highways were made, schools and churches built. Father went on to tell us that when he came to America he was positive he never could endure this lonely, primitive life. but after living here and building up the community, it was the dearest spot in the world. He told us the early years of their life together passed very quickly. They were so busy improving the land, raising their family, and helping to promote the things that brought improvements to the community. He closed by telling us that by right thinking and right living, we could take life's hardships and rise above all difficulties that we might have to face. He urged us never to be disheartened or dismayed. Somehow, things always turn out better then we expect.

After Father's talk, we urged Mother to tell us of her adventure during the last fifty years. As she rose, we could not help but notice that her hair was only partly gray, her brown eyes twinkling with pride as she looked around at all 134 her children, and great grand children. She did not tell about herself, but instead, told of her children. In poetry form, she entertained us in a humorous as well as serious manner. She told us how each one impressed her as small children, the different characteristics of each child, the illness and

Library of Congress

death of sister Flora in 1896, brother Willis passing in 1906, and the loneliness in the home after the children were taken. Still through it all, she and Father were grateful these two children were given to them even for the short years, for they brought much happiness to their home. She reminded us that as parents they always rejoiced with us in our joys. They were sad when we had sorrow or difficulties to endure. Mother then read a poem she had written in Dutch entitled "Our Children".

Different relatives and friends spoke briefly and told of the important part Mother and Father had had in the building of the community. Then followed many questions about their early life in Minnesota. Greetings and messages were read from relatives and friends in Holland and also United States.

This celebration stirred us deeply with emotion. After the relatives and friends left, the children gathered around the piano and sang songs and hymns as we used to do, Father and Mother joining in the chorus. The evening was spent informally, with open house from 8:00 P.M. to 10:30 P.M. Many nieces and nephews came to extend their best wishes. Refreshments were served. After the guests departed, the family group gathered around Father and Mother for a visit until the clock struck twelve and Father declared it was high time we children were all in bed.

Five years later, November 4, 1935, we 135 gathered in the home of Jennie Bryant, their eldest daughter, to celebrate Father and Mother's fifty-fifth wedding anniversary. All the children were present. Also, most of the grand children, great grand children, nieces, nephews, and many friends came from afar to congratulate the happy couple.

Father and Mother, looking no older and as active physically and mentally as five years before, entered into the activities with much interest. Early in the morning on the 4th of November found them on their way to Silver Creek to vote. They were given a great welcome and had their pictures taken in front of the town hall.

Library of Congress

We missed Mother's sister Mary who had passed away in May, 1931, and Father's brother Dick who died in June that same year. We were very grateful our parents had been spared and were enjoying good health.

After the delicious dinner, we called on Father for a talk. He did not tell us this time of their pioneer days but reviewed briefly the improvements that had come to the community the past years and urged us to help build this part of Minnesota as the old pioneers had done in the past, to support the worthwhile projects, and to make it a better state for our children, grand children, and generations yet unborn. He told us that as parents they often spoke of the happy life we as a family had had together. The children had given them little worry. He spoke of the evenings the family gathered in the living room, some reading, others doing school work. Then he went on to tell us that in the autumn of life, we could enjoy things we never enjoyed in our youth. It is then we enjoy the little things in life, the beauty of nature, we take time to 136 enjoy our grand children. When one reaches old age, you take time to value lifers good things. Troubles and disappointments do not impress older folks so deeply. Some things they had hoped and worked for in their youth he said they found were not worth while things. There is a joy in being alive, being healthy and able to do one's work. He told us old age was not to be dreaded but was an experience. It is like the fall of the year. We enjoy and cherish the best there is in life.

Mother then spoke briefly and told us there still was much work they wanted to do, and that they enjoyed life in their old age. She urged us to get whatever happiness we could out of each day. Some of the things they thought were hardships in their youth were really of very little importance. "Always enjoy the better things of life", she said, if you would enjoy old age. They enjoyed the love of their children and grand children, to visit friends, and take little trips. She closed by saying, "Trust in God at all times". These last words will linger with us always.

Marie Dalman gave the poem by Edgar Guest, "It Takes A Heap of Living".

Library of Congress

As the goodbyes were said, we all hoped we could return to help celebrate Father and Mother's sixtieth wedding anniversary. This privilege was not granted, for in the summer of 1938, Father grew tired and pale, although he worked with flowers, attended to his duties as secretary of the Creamery Association, and attended the meetings up to the week before his death. He was bright and alert until the end, which came October 28, 1938. He was in bed only two and a half days. He would have been eighty-three years of age on November 22, 1935. We laid him to rest on a beautiful October day, beside his oldest son 137 William and small daughter Flora, on the very place where he had his first home when he came to America. The place he disliked so much the first years of his life here, yet learned to love so dearly.

Following Father's death, Mother decided to visit her children during the winter months, but early each spring found her busy in her own home getting the house ready for the summer months.

The first winter of her widowhood, she traveled to Chillicothe, Missouri to visit her daughter Florence Cook and family, going from there to Sioux City, Iowa to visit her daughter Cornelia Workhoven and family. The following year she again made the trip. She enjoyed traveling and was very much interested in the new places she saw and the people she met.

Mother enjoyed good health and worked eagerly on her autobiography until May, 1941, when she had a very slight stroke. It however, did not affect her limbs, and in a month she seemed quite herself again and each day found her busy with her notes and writing. She attended to her flowers and assisted with the house work. The last week in July, she wrote me she had had another very slight stroke. Although she did not have to be in bed, she felt she was not as strong as she was before she had the stroke. Her strong desire to finish the story of her life kept her busy most of the day. In October, her general health seemed weakened, her heart, and stomach were causing her distress and the doctor ordered her remain in bed. The first weeks, she wrote cards and letters to her dear ones. As we came

Library of Congress

to help care for her from time to time, we could see she was failing. She was always so grateful for the loving care she received from her dear ones.

138

It was then she requested me to assemble the letters she had written and add the dates she had placed with her notes and have it printed for her descendants.

On the morning of December 11, 1941, as the snow was quietly falling down, Mother slept away. She was buried beside her husband, near her two children, her parents sister, two brothers, and dear little grand daughter Joyce.

All her children and all her grand children but one attended her funeral. As the family gathered around her grave, we thanked God for a wonderful Christian Mother who taught us to meet life's difficulties trusting God always.

Her work on earth was finished.

Cornelia Vandergon Workhoven